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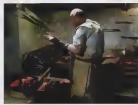
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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



You know the dungeon master character in *Hostel* – that hulking brute in a butcher's apron with the hunched back who disposes of bodies in the filthy bowels of the torture dungeon? Yeah, him. Ever wonder what his life is like? Did he apply for that job? Does he get benefits? Does he go home to a wife and complain about how his shoulders ache from slinging limbs into a furnace all day? Is he in a bowling league on weekends?

Of course you haven't wondered these things. That nameless ogre lurking in the abattoir is a cartoon representation, like the film's gun-toting thugs in black leather

jackets, the ruthless, lying prostitutes in fur-trimmed coats, and the grubby gang of prison street urchins robbing tourists. These aren't people so much as they are all themes in *Hostel*'s brazen Eastern European landscape, just waiting to snag and cut foreigners. They are presented as "The Other," a dangerous ethnic group lurking in abandoned factories in out-of-the-way towns across the ocean somewhere, meant to be feared by the American protagonists who dare set foot in their domain.

Whether it's Eli Roth's Slovaks, Russian ultra-nationalists in a Tom Clancy video game or the gangsters with vaguely Balkan accents and military haircuts that show up regularly in TV crime dramas, North American media has created a variety of Eastern Europeans as the threatening Other.

This notion of *The Other* – a concept that goes back to the writings of 18th-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – is also commonly understood as helping to define "The Self." So, in *Hostel*, for example, all that nastiness that those Eastern European stereotypes represent helps define the American protagonist – a clean-cut hero who values life enough that he'll help rescue a stranger from the dungeon – by virtue that he is the opposite of them. There is a very clear moral distinction between us and them, Self and Other (a notion that gets turned on its ear in *Hostel II* with the focus on the American torture tourists).

Things are more complicated in *A Serbian Film*. Milos, the porn star protagonist, is never threatened by foreigners, but rather by other Serbs. Then we learn that a member of his own family is in on his misery. But, worst of all, through drug-induced coercion, he ends up being the one responsible for the most heinous damage. There is no abstract representation of evil, the gap between *The Other* and *The Self* is obliterated during a sabbat-smashing assault of pornography, torture, rape, murder, pedo- and necrophilia.

This isn't *Jekyll & Hyde* or a werewolf story where the protagonist becomes *The Other* via supernatural means and isn't responsible for his crimes. Though a bit comically over-the-top at times, the story here is presented as a reality that Milos must come to terms with and take responsibility for in the end. The trailer for *Hostel* proclaims, "There is a place where all your sickest fantasies are possible." The trailer for *A Serbian Film* might as well say, "This is a place where your sickest nightmares are reality."

Beyond this, the torment of realizing that there is no division between hero and monster is one thing, but to have such a caustic story told as a very intentional metaphor for real-world atrocities – war crimes both committed by and against Serbia – results in something more dangerous. (Suddenly that dungeon master in *Hostel* seems like Fred Flinstone with a butcher knife.)

If this issue of *Rue Morgue* is any indication, the horror genre itself is becoming dangerous again. We've received angry letters about the violence in the *I Spat on Your Grave* remake; there's a column about vampire novels being challenged for their content; the *Gore-mag* writes about a makeup/effects artist going on trial for the gory serial killer art on his website, our film festival coverage includes the Korean serial killer movie *I Saw the Devil*, which was heavily censored in its own country; and the slasher movie *Hatchet II* (reviewed on p.38) was pulled from theatres after being released unrated (though I've read that this is due to its poor box office performance rather than its bloody content).

But none of those works force us into the position that we're placed in by *A Serbian Film*. I can't imagine what the experience of watching it is like from a Serbian standpoint (which is why we asked a Serbian to write the cover story). But, through the journey of Milos, even an outsider to the culture can feel a genuine pain and anger here, as the film forces us to contemplate real-life horrors from a new, unfamiliar perspective. We become the dungeon master, cranking our own arm into the meat grinder and turning the crank with a harrowing force.

Horror & Culture & Entertainment

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This issue of *Rue Morgue* is dedicated to Kevin McCarthy RIP.

COVER: A SERBIAN FILM

Design by Justin Erickson

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



I JUST HAD THE DISPLEASURE of viewing *A Serbian Film*. I have never seen a horror film I couldn't finish before, but this movie is something else. Don't get me wrong, I'm a huge fan of disturbing horror — love zombie movies and exploitation/gore flicks, such as *Kluge* and *Anthrax*. However, I just can't consider graphic infant rape to be good horror. Since when did horrible and horrifying cease to be different concepts? Is this the future of horror — each film simply a quest for the most disgusting material? Whatever happened to anticipation, mood and suspense?

SEPTEMBER SLATER
— EVERETT, WASHINGTON

I AM WRITING IN REGARDS to the letter in *RM#105* about the *I Spel on Your Grave* remake. I was a little confused as to the writer's point, apparently Shawne LaCasse was insulted by the violence against women. First of all, I never get supposed genre fans that complain about content in a horror or exploitation film — uh, what the fuck did you think you were watching in the first place? I agree with her about this film being remade, as I and countless other genre fans have stressed that remakes are viruses that must be destroyed. But for her to make the stupid comment for the film-makers to film in Darfur, and that there is nothing entertaining about rape? I almost lost my shit. I started laughing so hard. For anybody to sit on a soapbox and try to explain morality to the film industry is a little fucking retarded. Give me a break. I like watching rape, so there. I want to see some underground newcomer actress who signed on to this project for a credit and so she can get her SAG card get raped. I agree that what we watch for entertainment is questionable, but, in the end, do those involved with the film really give a fuck? They are moving on to the next project, not packing up and going on a feminist world tour to stop rape. I have not seen the remake, but for me the original is a classic and purposely made to elicit a strong reaction.

GUY DICK WERM — PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

TREVOR TUMINSKI WAS WAAAAAY too hard on *Predators* in *RM#104*. And the fact that he bashed it in both its initial review and the *Predator* Blu-ray review added insult to injury. This was a movie that took the franchise back to its bloody, macho roots, and he describes it as "aesthetic" and "no-brainer"? Come on. This movie wasn't supposed to be a carbon copy of the original; in fact, the idea of the screwy but deadly psychotics (as opposed to just soldiers) added a new dimension to their characters. The *Predators* themselves were

more badass than ever in this movie. Adrien Brody acquitted himself well and the "game preserve" concept was pretty cool. After the drack that was the two *AKP* movies and, let's face it, 1990's disappointing *Predator 2*, this movie was the true sequel that the original deserved. I just hope this one was successful enough to justify making *Army of Predators*, or whatever comes next. If it's like this, I'm there.

JOSH AUSTIN — FAYETTEVILLE, GEORGIA

I'M A LONG-TIME READER of *Rue Morgue* and, with one exception (*RM#107*, the Danzig issue), I have never been disappointed with this magazine. I find the movie reviews spot-on, and the coverage of older and harder-to-find material is more than welcome. *RM#104* is again a great read front to back, with one exception. I found the review of the *Murderdolls*' new album, *Women and Children Last*, to be a bit on the harsh side. They don't bring anything new to the plate, but I think that's not what the idea is here. I'm not saying this is a four out of five skull album, but DCA? The lyrics aren't as focused on B-movie killers and zombies as the last time, but is that really that big of a problem? Horror movies aren't all slasher flicks, are they? Especially these days, with movies like *Martyrs* and *[REC]* garnering such praise. I love my slashers but I also love more "realistic" horror. Why can't the *Murderdolls* as well? The "too-cool-for-school" guitar work seems to be purposeful. They're trying to resurrect some of the hairspray-embalmed mummy of glam rock. They do everything else over-the-top, so it's not surprising when the guitarist throws in some cheesy riffs, just to drive the point home. Anyways, I've said my piece and will continue to look forward to my next issue of *Rue Morgue*. Thanks for many years of great articles and hopefully many more to come.

SCOTT PENNELL
— KANLODPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA

JUST READ YOUR AMAZING September issue (*RM#104*). Kudos. One slight head-scratcher though... In your Audio Drome section, I was reading *Tomb Dragoniir*'s review of the new *Mad Sin* release and came across the following statement: "Germany's #1 sons return with another perfectly produced, steaming hot slice of psychobilly, some twenty-odd years since inventing the genre." Nonsense. The first true "psychobilly" band was The Meteors, who formed in England in 1980. *Mad Sin* were second generation psychobilly at best. Hardly "inventing" a genre that preceded them by a good seven years or so, and that's not even delving into the primordial ooze of The Cramps, Screaming Jay Hawkins, etc. Thank you and keep up the great work overall!

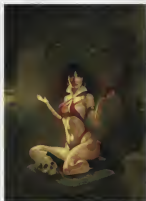
VINCE — ADDRESS WITHHELD

[Like *The Misfits* did with punk rock, *Mad Sin* brought an exaggerated theatrical element and sharp focus on horror imagery that's since defined the genre. I/N admit they didn't invent the notion of mixing horrific themes with rockabilly music, but they damn sure unleashed it on the world! — Tom]

I HAVE A SMALL COMPLAINT about the article highlighting artist Daniel Home from *RM#102* — we didn't get to see enough of his artwork! Daniel is an amazing and accomplished painter and sculptor, and I had the pleasure of meeting him at a horror convention earlier this year where he had several of his prints and busts on display. At that same convention, Mr. Home demonstrated his sculpting skills and created a classic "Old Witch" face from a lump of warm clay in under an hour. I now own a few of his prints and have my eye on a few of his busts! Thanks for running this article and sharing my favourite monster artist's work with the world!

DEREK M. KOCH — BEAVERTON, OREGON

[Derek, we've included Daniel Home's take on *Vampires* for your viewing pleasure. Enjoy — Ed]



WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO SEND THEIR COMMENTS VIA MAIL, OR EMAIL. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT. PLEASE SEND TO: RM@RUE-MORQUE.COM OR

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Headlines



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

THE THING PREQUEL AIMS TO REPLICATE WORLD OF ORIGINAL FILM

Almost 30 years after the release of *The Thing*, Universal Pictures has announced that a prequel to John Carpenter's 1982 film will hit theatres on April 29, 2011. The new film, also tentatively titled *The Thing*, centres on a team of researchers at a remote Norwegian outpost who accidentally unearth a parasitic alien presence while investigating a spaceship frozen into the Antarctic tundra. This may sound like the latest in a rash of Hollywood remakes, but according to executive producer David Foster, a revisit to *The Thing* universe has been in the works since the late '90s.

"This is a completely different story," asserts Foster, who also produced the original film. "It's what led up to the destruction of the Norwegian camp, how it happened and why. It's not a remake, it's a prequel. This is a picture that stands alone. You don't have to have seen the first one to understand this one."

Speaking from the Toronto set of the new film, which stars Joel Edgerton (*Star Wars* II - *Attack of the Clones*) and Mary Elizabeth Winstead (*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*), Foster explains that the project grew out of a planned TV miniseries for the Syfy network, with Frank Darabont (*The Mist*, *The Walking Dead*) directing, but once Universal caught wind of what its television subsidiary had in the works, it requisitioned the rights for a feature film. Though Foster has revisited the director's material before with *The Fog* (2005), the veteran producer had no luck getting Carpenter to return for a prequel.

"John's attitude is amazing," notes Foster. "He said, 'Yeah, go ahead, make me rich. He personally will never remake any of his films. He says, 'I've done them once, that was my vision of the film. I'd be happy to be a producer with you, work together on the script but I don't want to talk to the director, if it's possible, because I don't want to insult him and I don't want him to think I'm looking over his shoulder. If another director was looking



Joel Edgerton and Mary Elizabeth Winstead on the set of *The Thing* (2011).

over my shoulder while I was doing a movie, I'd kick him in the ass."

To that end, Dutch commercial director Matthijs Van Heijningen Jr. was tapped to helm the prequel, which was shot mostly in and around Toronto this past spring, with some exterior shooting at the same locations in Stewart, British Columbia that were used for Carpenter's film.

"I saw [the original] when I was seventeen or something and I always wondered why they never made a sequel, why nobody took the opportunity to do it earlier," says Van Heijningen Jr., whose pitch to the studio was for the movie "to be shot like *Alien* and have the same paranoia as the [Carpenter] movie."

While there's certainly no shortage of admiration for the source material among the cast and crew, Van Heijningen Jr. says the one thing that will set his movie apart is the emphasis on character development.

"I think you're going to see a movie about real people that you're really going to care about, and you're going to be hurt when you see those people die, when you see them fighting for their life."

Producer Eric Newman (*Down of the Dead* remake, *Slither* and *The Last Exorcism*) says the prequel is intended to be a companion piece and that the ending of this *Thing* should butt up against the beginning of the original.

"I've watched [the 1982 film] 150 times now and it's so good," says Newman. "The reason to do this was to tell a story that fit into the Carpenter universe, and we had to be aware of everything that happened in that movie... it's a nightmare that gets worse and worse for the characters."

He adds, "They're definitely big shoes to fill but we feel like everything we've done honours the original."

TREVOR TUMINSKI



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THE DARK TOWER SAGA SET TO RETURN IN MULTIPLE FORMATS

The *Dark Tower*, that sweeping Stephen King dark fantasy epic, the first volume of which was released nearly 30 years ago, is headed to the big screen. And the small screen. And possibly back to the printed page.

In September, Universal Pictures and NBC announced that they've plucked up the rights to produce three films and a television series based on the tale of the gunslinger Roland and his quest to protect the very underpinnings of reality. The first movie and first season of the TV series are to be directed by Ron Howard and written by Akiva Goldsman, the team that brought us the film adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code*. (Each season of the TV series will act as a "bridge" between the films.)

"By telling this story across media platforms and over multiple hours — with a view to telling it completely — we have our best chance of translating Roland's quest to reach the Dark Tower onto screen," Goldsman said in a prepared statement. No word yet on when the first movie will go into production.

"To the best of my knowledge, nothing like this has ever been attempted," says Bev Vincent, author of *The Road to the Dark Tower*, a King-endorsed study of the series. "Will you be able to just watch the movies and not feel like something's missing? And what happens to this plan if the ratings for the TV series don't live up to expectations and it gets cancelled, the way *Kingdom Hospital* did?"

More importantly, are there enough people out there even willing to dip their toes into the obscure world of the seven-volume saga?

"Even a large segment of King's fan base hasn't tackled the series," Vincent points out. "The filmmakers won't be able to play safely to readers of the series because that's probably not enough to make a successful movie."

In the past, King has taken an "all out" or "all in" approach to movie and television adaptations of his work, Vincent says. For example, with writer/director Frank Darabont (*The Mist*, *The Shawshank Redemption*), King turned all of the decision-making over to him and his producers. Otherwise, Vincent points out, the author



The *Dark Tower*: Feature films, a TV series and a new book are all in the works.

is very hands-on, penning script drafts, executive producing and even assisting with casting.

Vincent points out: "He did this with many of the miniseries, including *The Stand* and *The Shining*. My gut feeling, based on the scope of this project, is that he'll go 'all out' and let the producers run with it as they see fit."

Despite King's own view of the series as his magnum opus, this wouldn't be the first time he's let others play in his *Dark Tower* sandbox. Since 2007, a prequel to the story has played out in a successful Marvel

Comics series plotted by King's research assistant, Robin Furth, and written by Peter David, with art by Jae Lee and Richard Isanove. (The comics, too, are included in the Universal/NBC deal.) In November 2009, King also revealed that he's preparing to start work on a new book in the *Dark Tower* series, tentatively titled *The Wind Through the Keyhole*.

Lost in all of the film and television talk is the reality of what it means for a story to be optioned. Universal and NBC now have the right to invest millions in Roland's quest, but no obligation to do so. That the project is far from a sure thing, even with Hollywood heavyweights onboard, can be evidenced by the fact that just this past spring *Lost* and *Cloverfield* creator J.J. Abrams was planning to tackle the *Dark Tower* movies, along with *Lost* writer Damon Lindelof. In April, Abrams told entertainment website IGN.com, "As soon as *Lost* is done, hopefully we'll be able to begin tackling it."

Vincent says he's seen it before. "Back when [King's] *The Talisman* was optioned, people used to ask who should play Jack Sawyer. After a while, I started joking that they should cast a baby because, by the time the film actually made its way into production, he'd be the right age. Turns out my pessimism was overly optimistic, because a baby cast at that point would be twice Jack's age by now — and there's still no more sign of an adaptation than there was 25 years ago."

A.S. BERMAN



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"IF ONCE, A ZOMBIE MOVIE THAT DEFIES EXPECTATION"
— *The New Yorker*

ROADKILL



youtube.com/watch?v=9W0vqL5Bh_Y

Richard Gale's brilliant, bloody *Intensive* 2008 short film *The Horribly Slow Murderer with the Extremely Inefficient Weapon* can now be viewed in its entirety (in HD) on YouTube. Guaranteed to leave you in stitches, it answers the age-old question of just how long it might take to strangle an unwilling victim to death with a dull piece of cutlery. "Being spooned" has a whole new meaning.

welcome-to-monster-land.blogspot.com
While it's undeniably difficult to pull oneself away from the *Left 4 Dead* video games, fans of the zombie-horror series may want to try, if only for long enough to read this immersive, Mike Cerning/Illustrated comic book prequel to the new downloadable expansion. Called "The Sacrifice," it features the return of the characters from the original game.

14d.com/comic

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shloggsghorrorblog.blogspot.com

Not unlike *Monster Land*, Schlogg's Horror Blog is another website that delves deeper into our beloved genre, only Schlogg's specialty is most definitely scary movies. Covering everything from the Universal Monsters, to the oeuvre of David Cronenberg, to new titles such as *Machete*, Schlogg's lengthy posts are equal parts intellectual, conversational and fun.

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Didja know that you can follow Rue Morgue on Twitter? Keep up to date on all of our latest contests, blog posts and upcoming horror happenings, eavesdrop on the weird and wacky things overheard at the Rue Morgue House of Horror, and even follow the macabre adventures of the Rue Crew via the "stalk" list. We are legion.

Compiled by MONICA S. KUEFLER

Got a Roadkill suggestion? Email a link to: roadkill@rue-morgue.com

FX LEGEND GREG NICOTERO ADDS 'DIRECTOR' TO RESUMÉ

After 22 years of circling the globe creating makeup effects for such films as *Day of the Dead*, *Army of Darkness* and *The Walking Dead* TV series, Greg Nicotero is finally making a pit stop—in the director's chair.

The 47-year-old, whose filmography boasts nearly 800 credits, recently announced his first feature film directing gig will be an adaptation of *The Drive-In*, Bubba Ho-jo writer Joe R. Lansdale's darkly humorous, bloody night at the movies tale.

"So many elements of *The Drive-In* have been nodded to in other material, but the idea that a group of people are trapped by some otherworldly force inside a drive-in theatre and how the society adapts while becoming lost in the films themselves is fascinating to me," confesses Nicotero. "There are a few projects that I would love to do but this was always on the top of the list—just fun and weird and scary and outrageous all at the same time."

Nicotero's first directorial effort, a short titled *United Monster Talent Agency*, is currently getting warm reviews while playing the festival circuit. In it, he basically rewrites monster history by suggesting the existence of a facility that developed and represented zombies, creatures and stars such as King Kong during their Hollywood heyday, and wraps the concept in a black and white neo-noir-style framework. The low letter to the Universal monsters features stunning costumes and makeup effects, plus cameos from the likes of Frank Darabont, Eli Roth and Robert Rodriguez.

"Given my background, I felt people would be expecting me to do something really gory, showcasing just the effects, but I wanted to do something that had charm and humor to it," explains Nicotero. "I have had a great education.... Being able to be on set and work next to guys like Quentin Tarantino, Frank Darabont, George Romero, Steven Spielberg and Robert Rodriguez has put me in a place I never imagined."

Though he has no plans to abandon special effects and makeup work, Nicotero reveals that he and comedian Dana Gould (who has a Lawrence Tubb/Woof Man-style role in the short) are working on a feature version of *UMTA*. "It is the idea of being able to see it and shape it with the help of the talent I had around me," he explains of the switch to directing, "and as it coalesces everything sharper, and the closer you get to shooting the more exciting and frightening it becomes."

THEY'D TUMINSKI

ENTRAILS

► In September, William Peter Blatty, creator of *The Exorcist*, filed suit against Warner Bros. in US District Court in Los Angeles, asking for a peek at the company's financial records so he can determine if he's owed money on the 1973 film, which has earned an estimated \$400 million. Blatty, 82, has filed suit against the studio twice before, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

► Kevin McCarthy, who will forever be known for starring in the 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, died Sept. 11 at the age of 96. In addition to that movie, he played the killer fish broker in the original 1978 flick *Piranha*, and the uncle doomed to perform demented magic tricks for the amusement of Jeremy Licht's reality-warping teen in *Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983). Other credits include episodes of *Lights Out*, *Twilight Zone* and *Joker* *Sandwich*, as well as *The Howling* (1981) and *Ghoules II: Ghoules Go to College* (1991).

► The Alamo Drafthouse in Austin, Texas announced in September that it's branching out into film distribution with Drafthouse Films. Though its first title will be Chris Morris' phd-st drama *Four Lions* (which opens this fall), the cinematic home of the annual Fantastic Fest genre festival and *Am!t: It's Cool* News website founder Harry Knowles' Butt-Mumbo-A-Thon movie screening, will undoubtedly snap up some horror-centric titles in the future.

► Masked heavy metal maniacs Slipknot ended months of uncertainty in September when drummer Joey Jordison said the band would release another album despite the overdose death of bassist and co-founder Paul Gray

in May. Though Jordison declined to say when new music would be forthcoming, he told the UK's *Guardian* newspaper that Gray won't be replaced. Earlier that month, Gray's widow gave birth to their first child.

► In August's *Variety* Fair, James Cameron took a swipe at *Alexander* Aja's *Piranha 3D*, saying it's "an example of what we should not be doing in 3-D. Because it just cheapens the medium and reminds you of the bad 3-D horror films from the '70s and '80s, like *Friday the 13th 3-D*." *Piranha* producer Mark Canton fired back with a statement a few days after the interview's publication, calling Cameron's comments "ridiculous, self-serving and insulting." Already looking ahead to the sequel, *The Weinstein Co.* told reporters in September that they plan to allow people to vote online for the celebrity they'd most like to see meet a gory demise in the sequel. *Friday* fans may have a suggestion.

► The personal papers of Fredric Wertham, the psychiatrist credited for driving horror comics from American newstands in the 1950s (see *AMN104*), were opened to the public by the US Library of Congress in Washington, DC. In all, 222 containers have been made available, including several copies of comic books with annotations highlighting the violent bits, as well as drawings made by patients that Wertham thought illustrated "the confusion created by comic books between fantasy and reality." The Library acquired the collection in 1987. More info, including three photos from the collection, at <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/06/papers-of-comic-book-william-open-at-library/>

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CORONER'S REPORT ★

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

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106

The area surrounding Macken High School in Northern Australia is experiencing a population explosion of bats. Apart from being forced to deal with massive amounts of guano, the school must keep its windows closed and not use its bells to avoid causing the critters to panic and swarm.

French silent film actress Sarah Bernhardt was known to travel with a coffin; she would lie in it when learning her lines.

Despite the urban legends, human hair and fingernails do not continue to grow after death; they simply appear as if they do because the skin retracts during the process of decay.

Shock rockers GWAR have used as many as ten "barrels" of fake blood in a single show, totalling over 60 gallons.

In the late 1800s, French physiologist Charles Brown-Séquard touted that injecting a concoction created from the testicles of a newly dead dog would extend one's life.

Friday the 13th actress Adrienne King, who played Alice in the original movie, recently released her own wine called Crystal Lake, from Valley View Winery. It sells for \$20 a bottle and includes her autograph.

A 44-year-old Brampton, Ontario man was recently charged with fraud and "pretending to practice witchcraft" after allegedly performing occult-related services out of his suburban home.

According to *A Rough Guide to Cult Movies*, the term "splatter cinema" first entered the horror lexicon in 1978 when George A. Romero used it to describe *Dawn of the Dead*.

It took fifteen days to mummify a dead royal in ancient Egyptian society.

The vampire has been used to advertise many things over the years, including alarm systems, cat food and software. It was also used in a recruiting campaign for the Lutheran Church. ("With all due respect to Hollywood, there's more to Christianity than stopping vampires.")

Omaha police, who were responding to a report of trespassing at an abandoned house earlier this fall, made an unusual discovery: a garage full of tombstones, some dating back to the 1800s. Police have yet to determine how the headstones came to be there.

Val Lewton's *Cat People* (1941) features a Serbian shape-shifter legend about an enslaved village that turns to witchcraft. Screenwriter Jacques Tourneur invented the folklore for the film; it has no connection to actual Serbian folklore.

Octopuses who are suffering extreme stress will occasionally begin to eat themselves.

Compiled by MONICA S. KUEBLER

Get a weird stat or morbid fact? Send it through to info@horror-magazine.com

THE RUE MORGUE SICK TOP SIX



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POST-MIDNIGHT SNACK ATTACKERS
2. THE GATE
SUBURBAN BACKYARD BEASTIES
3. LEPRECHAUN
CAUSTIC UNLUCKY HARMS
4. CRITTERS
TERRIFYING TRIBBLES
5. GHOULES
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 - MICHAEL CERVERIS (Stake Land, Fringe) • AJ BOWEN (The House of the Devil, A Horrible Way to Die)
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BEYOND THE PALE!



DEMON
HUNTSMAN



The Grandfather

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NEEDFUL THINGS



1



2



4



3



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THE ART OF ATROCITY

A NEW WAVE OF RAGE-FUELLED CINEMA IS REARING ITS HEAD IN SERBIA. ULTRA-VIOLENT PORNOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY CRUSHING, ONE MOVIE IN PARTICULAR HAS LEFT A TRAIL OF DEVASTATION IN ITS WAKE.

STEEL YOURSELF FOR
A SERBIAN FILM.

BY DEJAN OGNJANOVIC

The verdict is still out on whether *A Serbian Film* is a vile piece of gruesome exploitation or a valid artistic expression of a decidedly extreme experience – or, whether it can be both.

Various comparisons have been made to films ranging from rough snuff re-enactments in the vein of the *August Underground* series, to more polished but still graphic genre outings such as *Martyrs*, all the way to respected art house classics such as Pasolini's *Salo: 120 Days of Sodom* or Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible*. Whatever the case, critics who have seen the still-unreleased film during its festival run agree that no other recent work has shocked, provoked, disgusted and angered as many audiences, resulting in it being censored and banned, and even leading to death threats against its director.



Trying to break the boundaries between genre and art, exploitation and statement, film and reality, newcomer Srdjan Spasojevic's debut feature – co-written by Aleksandar Radivojevic – is a devastating sado-masochistic descent into darkness. Srdjan Todorovic stars as Miro, an ex-porn star who accepts one last job in a shady but well-paying "art-porn" production in order to earn enough so that he can leave the country with his wife and child. As the production becomes increasingly strange and violent, he decides to quit, but there is no escape; he's drugged and forced to participate in a series of escalating atrocities – including assault, rape and murder – that eventually involve his family. (It's all set to an aggressive electronic soundtrack by rapper Wilkub Sky of Serbian hip-hop trio Bad Copy, which

increases the sickening atmosphere considerably.) Though the plot is simple and the acts depicted sickeningly graphic, this is only the shocking surface of a complex work.

The title is key. "*A Serbian Film*", speaks directly to a national identity. The early 1990s – when the directors of the new wave of Serbian cinema were growing up – were tumultuous times for what used to be Yugoslavia. As the country was splintering along ethnic/religious lines it was falling into chaos – a period when abnormality became quite normal. Images of slaughtered bodies were a staple of prime time in the notorious *Additional News* program, which featured detailed reports of various war crimes in the neighbouring Croatia and Bosnia. Those were political snuff films, whose main aim was to enrage the public and mobilize them for the war. Gruesome photos of Serbian heads cut off by the Moughadeen, who fought for the Bosnian Muslims, and brief footage of Serbian paramilitaries executing



Stojanovic
as Miloš

Bosnian Muslims were widely publicized. Similarly, the 1999 NATO bombing further devastated a country already impoverished by years of economic sanctions and other forms of foreign and domestic destruction.


Sentiments of injustice and abandonment, and motifs of orphans or absent parents, scar not just *A Serbian Film* but an entire wave of recent movies from the country. Collective memories of these atrocities are at the root of *Tears for Sale* (p.21), Uros Stojanovic's grim fantasy about survival in necrophilic times; *Who the F**k is Miloš Brankovic*, a strange, overtly nationalistic thriller about the downfall of "Serbian values" by means of international Gay-Jew-Atheist-NGO conspiracy(!); Mladen Djordjevic's *Made in Serbia*, a semi-documentary about the grotesquely pitiful Serbian porn "industry"; plus his blackly comedic, bloody, sexually explicit road movie *The Life and Death of a Porno Gang* (p.19), which is also currently on the festival circuit. The harshest of the bunch – a movie based on images of pornography, rape, butchery and disembowelment – could not have been titled anything else but *A Serbian Film*. (This summer it headlined the Subversive Serbia program featured at Montreal's Fantasia film festival – co-curated by the writer of this article).

Rather than being a piece of auto-racism, however, it seems to be playing upon the expectations (and prejudices) associated with how this locale is perceived among both the Serbs and in the West, and can be understood as a certain grotesque-parody of Serbia's current image as "monster" in the eyes of foreigners. As such, it inevitably implicates the viewers and the preconceptions they bring with them. In *A Serbian Film* no one is innocent: not women, not children, not grannies, and especially not the audience.

Stojanovic speaks to *Rue Morgue* from Serbia, to help us understand one of the most nihilistic cinematic experiences ever conceived.

One American critic called A Serbian Film "one of the angriest films I've ever seen." What is the root of that rage?

My approach to moviemaking is honest, emotional and instinctive. I don't feel at ease with theory, and cannot analyze a work in progress as a finished thing – I merely follow my instinct and the idea I believe in. That's why sometimes I'm surprised by the complex analyses and reviews that other people write about the film I've made. In their layered readings I encounter things I never consciously contemplated, yet they're evidently there. However, I'm sorry to say that something like *A Serbian Film* places one in a position to explain things dealing with emotions, instincts and other stuff that should be left to the experience and feeling of the audience and to the judgments of the critics – whatever they be, positive or negative. Having all that in mind, I suppose that the anger is caused by the inferno we've been living in for decades in a country with a centuries-long specialty in devouring and vomiting back any kind of life for breakfast, lunch, dinner and two desserts. This feeling does not exclude the rest of the world – i.e. anger caused by this sterile humanity which, contrary to its own marketing, suffocates any kind of freedom, losing all feeling for right and wrong in the process.



I DIDN'T PLAN TO
BREAK ANY BARRIERS,
BUT MERELY TO TAKE
MY DEEPEST AND MOST
SINCERE FEELINGS AND
IMPALE THEM RIGHT
ON THE SCREEN.

BRITAN SPASOJEVIĆ

How did you get funding for such an extreme film?

A Serbian Film is one of the very few instances of a truly independently made film in Serbia in the last few decades. It was financed by private funds and never got a penny from state-supported competitions or funds – although this is customary for most films in Serbia, where the state participates at least partially in the production or post-production.

How difficult was it to cast such a movie, particularly the underage actor who plays Milos' son?

The casting went pretty smoothly because we managed to get the actors who were our first choices. We were lucky that they all believed in the idea of A Serbian Film and wanted to take part in a project like this. The same with the kid playing Milos' son. His parents understood very well the message we're sending with this film and had absolute trust in us.

What's your attitude towards horror? Although A Serbian Film is not a "pure" example of that genre, that's the label it gets most often because of its extreme imagery, gore and shocks.

I'm not much into theory, including genre theory. I view horror like any other genre, but I have to note that it offers a wide variety of different films. I feel closer to films like *The Exorcist*, *Halloween* or *The Shining* than to those made for sheer entertainment, although there are great movies among them, too. Trash horrors can also be very intriguing and intelligent, regardless of whether that approach was taken because of a limited budget, avoiding seriousness or the author was seriously interested in that particular style. They seem like a separate genre to me, and it's great we can enjoy all those kinds. A Serbian Film is certainly not a conventional

horror film, but because of its overall impact and impression created, it doesn't seem to be able to avoid the horror label, although I see it primarily as a drama that ventures down into hell. Which brings us back to horror, I guess? [Laughs]

How did you meet your co-screenwriter, Alexander Radivojevic, and how did the story develop?

Alexandar is the son of a professor from film school, noted director Milos Radivojevic. Although we are very different, both of us had a very clear idea about what we wanted and how to get it. The aim was to use the deepest and most sincere feelings towards the world we live in, combined with a cinematic style we love, and to nail all that onto the screen with no compromises or second thoughts about possible reactions to such an approach in the schizophrenic world of false morality. Our work on this script went rather smoothly and brought out a very good combination of my action-revenge "Chuck Norris" hero and Alexander's favourite horror "character," namely Evil. Evil itself – pure or in any of its extreme forms of manifestation.

Why title it A Serbian Film?

I've been thinking long about the title. A Serbian Film came to me as the first option and it remained the most accurate. It is a complex title which is explained by the film itself. It refers to Serbian films in general and to any kind of Serbian product which has lost its identity. The title is one of those things I'd rather not explain or provide guidelines for its interpretation. That should be left to the viewers.

Was the movie inspired by any particular real-life incidents, or is it simply the fallout of growing up during wartime?

To live in these regions in the past few decades meant experiencing a unique real-life horror. You don't need anything more inspiring than that. Serbia participated in a few civil wars (Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo) in a very short time and was devastated by NATO bombings for three months. Do you expect that such events would not leave any consequences? People who live elsewhere, especially in the West, don't want to know about problems in certain regions and they think that films like this are being made out of boredom or for the sake of shock or in order to get "big bucks."

The Life and Death of a Porno Gang

PAIN AND PERVERSION IN THE BALKANS

A Serbian Film isn't the only recent film out of that country to shock by taking us into a world where life is cheap, disposable and profitable. *The Life and Death of a Porno Gang*, the debut film by Mladen Djordjevic, deals with an ensemble of outsiders (junkies, gays, transes, porn actors) traveling rural Serbia with their sex show cabaret. Sex sells badly, however, so they're lured into making snuff films, but with a twist: unlike American horrors, in which unwilling "actors" fight to escape the clutches of insane directors, here the victims agree voluntarily. In an environment where all hope is abandoned, a new set of outsiders appears—those willing to sacrifice themselves to sustain their destitute families.

It is not nearly as bleak as *A Serbian Film*, however. Though both are similarly themed, expertly shot (albeit in very different styles) by Nemanja Jovanovic, and boast convincing makeup effects by Miroslav Lakobirja, *A Serbian Film* dives into the world of pornography, snuff and splatter with obvious debts to American genre and exploitation cinema, while *Porno Gang* owes much more to Euro-trash and indie filmmaking. With the energy of the colourful protagonists and their grotesque adversaries (rednecks, the corrupted police, etc.), this blend of sexuality, splatter and black humour is as invigorating as, say, Takashi Miike's *Visitor Q*.

"This film is the result of my interest in the hidden worlds, such as the world of porn actors—my yearning to discover that which is hidden," explains Djordjevic. "And it can be seen in the movie because, despite the violence in it, there is some warmth, too. I was not trying to protect the characters or excuse them. I wanted to have people with whom it is difficult to identify, but through the course of the film you get close to them and get to like them."

Bill Jenkins: *Film* 's effects are obvious influences from American, European and perhaps Japanese film. It has taken compared to works by filmmakers as different as, say, *Vincent & the Doctor*, *Guilty Mind*, *Personal Languish*, *El Niño*, *Yoko Ono* and *Takashi Miike*. What do you think about these, and who are your real influences?

I grew up on the films of directors like William Friedkin, David Cronenberg, Sam Peckinpah, John Carpenter, Walter Hill and Sergio Leone. I have a deep respect for most of the names you mentioned. Stylistically, *A Serbian Film* doesn't have much in common with Peckinpah, but it shares his power and attitude. *Nos* has a note of bleakness which is a thing of honesty, not of pessimism, and that's what I like. Hooper is a special case: a man who doesn't want to "learn the rules" of directing and has made genre cult films and a masterpiece like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Mike is one of the most fuck-up directors out there, and I mean that in the most positive sense. As for other influential names, I'd also like to mention Chan-Wook Park, Lars Von Trier, South Park and John Rambo.

The movie is riddled with scenes of atrocity; what was the most difficult sequence to shoot?

The most difficult to shoot was the beheading scene because we had to combine several puppets, several different makeup effects in a country whose movie industry never had such complex demands. But in the end it all turned out excellent, I think.

Polina: *Michael* is dragged and set loose on a victim, opposite top a hooded assailant, and opposite bottom his family suffers the aftermath.

Anyone looking for more torture porn will be disappointed because *Porno Gang* has the ingredient lacking in most of those flicks: relatable human characters and intriguing dramatic situations. This, of course, heightens the suspense once the characters become victims of their choices. It's a journey full of transgressive images—some of them are of a sexual nature (frontal nudity and explicit sex), while others bring it closer to the horror genre, such as a very convincing (but staged) scene of animal violence, the strong and bloody use of a razor (think *Halloween* if in a naturalistic environment), a sledgehammer to the head, a chainsaw decapitation, and some more conventional but exceptionally gory gunshot wounds.

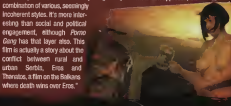
"The explicit imagery is more than just shock," says Djordjevic. "Ultimately, shock is not particularly interesting to me. This violence in the film expresses a destructive attitude towards reality. I wanted the explicitness to be taken so far as to desecrate the reality, the next step is just to make the celluloid burn. I'm interested in deepening the violence and destruction until there is a light at the end of the tunnel. To deepen it so much through the negative energy that the darkness would eventually bring some light."

The impact of the brutal images is made twice as heavy by the choice to shoot the film in a semi-documentary, vérité style, against the backdrop of rural Serbia, which is decidedly non-stylized—no dungeons with hanging chains here. Djordjevic admits that his influences are closer to a style of campy horror, as seen in the films by Chile's Alejandro Jodorowsky and Canadian Bruce LaBruce, or at least of apocalyptic American indie directors such as John Waters or Paul Morrissey, with the inevitable shadow of Mike looming over as well. Ultimately, like *A Serbian Film*, *The Life and Death of a Porno Gang* transcends the horror genre. (North American audiences can decide for themselves when the movie is eventually released by Synapse Films, which snapped up the North American rights earlier this year.)

"I wanted to see how camp would work in the mud," says Djordjevic. "I think it is a very interesting combination. I am very intrigued by this meta-film approach, the combination of various, seemingly incoherent styles. It's more interesting than social and political engagement, although *Porno Gang* has that layer also. This film is actually a story about the conflict between rural and urban Serbia, Eric and Therese, a film on the Balkans where death wins over Eric."

Why did you feel that the notorious "newborn porn" scene was necessary?

I consider the scene of "newborn porn" necessary and proper for several reasons. It is one of the heights of sincerity of this film. That scene, like other violent scenes in the film, is not supposed to look cool and entertaining—it should disgust you and make you scream "Enough!" to such a way of life. ... The NBP scene is a literal depiction of the feeling we have for living in this region—the baby represents all of us whose innocence and youth were stolen by the dirty and corrupted "authorities" governing our lives, and by those I mean both Serbian and foreign authorities. The baby also represents all young artists in Serbia but also is applicable to those abroad, who are not allowed to think and express themselves freely, i.e. differently from the recognized mainstream. ... Also, the NBP scene shows us who Vukmir (the shady



TRADITION OF TERROR

A LOOK AT SERBIA'S
**UNKNOWN
HORROR FILMS**

Serbian folklore has always been ripe with scary creatures and tales of spooky encounters with vampires and other supernatural beings. In fact, the word "vampire" entered the English language through translations of reports made by Austro-Hungarian officers who purportedly witnessed a vampire cruise in the Serbian village of Medveđa in 1732. Those accounts, well-known to vampirologists, transcribed the Serbian word "vampir" as "vampyr" and very soon its variations spread. However, despite the country's macabre folklore, very few horror tales entered Serbian literature or, later, film. Various cultural factors made deal-

ings with death virtually unthinkable. At first it was the rampant rationalism and didacticism of the 19th century and then, after World War II, the communist rule, which did not favour supernaturalism in any shape, including art. This is why few horror films were made while Serbia was still part of Yugoslavia, but those that did get made are of exceptional quality. Currently, almost none of them are available on DVD with English subtitles. Virtually unknown outside of Serbia, barely covered in English-language reference books, these are the films that comprise the country's cinematic contributions to the genre.

THE SHE-BUTTERFLY

This made-for-TV movie was the first Serbian horror film, although not originally advertised as such. The film's fright factor caused one man to die of a heart attack upon its first prime-time airing on state TV, and it still enjoys cult status in all ex-Yugoslav states. Based on a revered classic of 19th-century Serbian literature, *The She-Butterfly* deals with Strahinja, a poor lad in rural Serbia who falls in love with the local landowner's daughter. In order to prove himself worthy of her love, he has to spend a night in an accused mill. It is said that a vampire is sucking the blood of unfortunate mill men, thereby bringing the village to the verge of famine. Strahinja manages to survive the night, but the vampire escapes. Luckily, the lad learns the monster's name and, following a prolonged search, the creature's grave is found. A group of villagers seemingly dispatch it with a stake through the unopened coffin, but the young man has yet to meet the real horror—in his wedding night.

THE PROTECTED

A man is haunted by a mysterious follower who claims to be his protector, and not even the baroque asylum where he runs for shelter can shield him from his doom, because the creepy man after him is not human at all. Arty, Gothic atmosphere pervades this black and white TV film, which is filled with metaphysical dread.

MAIDENLY MUSIC

Like the previous two entries, *Maidenly Music* is a made-for-TV movie directed by revered filmmaker Djorđe Kadijević. It depicts the doom which befalls a young man who comes across a castle in which a solitary maiden lives. A romance builds between them, but in the end he discovers the real, nightmarish source for the strange "music" that he hears within the fortress' walls.

THE DREAM OF DR. MISIC

This very spooky TV film by Serbian actor-director Branko Pleša is positively thick with Gothic atmosphere. The story revolves around a bachelor doctor in the countryside who is haunted by a dream in which a dead girl he's supposed to dissect leads him to his own death. He pays no heed to stories about spirits, omens and premonitions, but his fate will prove that there's more to life than science taught him.

THE DAMNED THING

Long before *Twelve Hours of Horror* episode, Branko Pleša adapted Ambrose Bierce's celebrated short story "The Damned Thing" into an unusual TV film of the same name. Unlike Hooper's version, it was faithful in word and spirit to Bierce, barely takes an arty approach in depicting the terror of a man encountering an invisible entity, which slaughters people in the marshes.

GAASP!

A series of unspeakable atrocities haunts a modern high-rise block. A young doctor traces the source of a stinky, yellowish mist to a decrepit crematorium located nearby, but it does not stop the disaffected, alienated people from killing themselves. Directed by Vlatko Gilic, *Gaspi* is a slower, inventive companion piece to David Cronenberg's *Shivers*.

VARIOLA VERA

Inspired by a real event from early 1970s, when a Kosovo Muslim brought smallpox from his pilgrimage to the Middle East back to a Belgrade hospital and created a small-scale epidemic, *Variola Vera* has more than history on its mind. The gruesome disease is a metaphor for the sick socialist state, and the claustrophobic feel of the quarantine—as well as the film's gory images—are not to be forgotten. It also boasts an excellent script and direction by Goran Markovic, and stars notables

Eroland Josephson and Rade Serbedzija. *Mivola Vera* introduced large-scale genre elements into then-Yugoslav cinema and seemed poised to win critical accolades, however the year of its release was the only year in the history of the major film festival in Pola (now in Croatia) that the Grand Prix honour was not awarded to any film.

STRANGLER VS. STRANGLER

(Bosnian month: December, 1994)

A fantastic serial killer black comedy with great cult potential, *Strangler vs. Strangler* revolves around a big, fat, shy, mother-fucked man, played with deadpan perfection by one of Serbia's greatest comedians, Taske Macic. He lives with his cruel mother-in-law and sells flowers, adhering to his motto of "Those who don't like carnations don't deserve to live!" His victims are the young women who refuse to buy his flora and humiliate him in public. The film follows three main characters: the strangler, the incompetent and highly neurotic inspector on his trail and the nerdy rock singer attracted to the killer's exploits.

DEJA VU

This horror thriller, directed by Goran Markovic, concerns a troubled piano teacher named Miroslav and his efforts to keep his sanity through a love affair with a poor but industrious girl. When she dumps him for a younger man, he becomes unable to distinguish the "reflections" of his history upon his own present and is driven over the edge. Overman by the ghosts of his past, Miroslav embarks on a killing spree. *Deja Vu* won most major Serbian awards for best direction, best film and best male and female protagonists.

A HOLY PLACE

Loosely based on Nikola Gogor's story "why," this delightfully perverse film by veteran filmmaker Djordje Radjenovic is a Gothic masterpiece in which Slavic folklore is effectively merged with a decadent, erotic subtext about disturbed psyches inhabiting an isolated farm. A young priest is forced to spend three nights locked in a church, singing psalms over the dead body of a woman who was a witch while alive. Now that's something much worse. One of the first victims of the civil wars in ex-Yugoslavia, which fell apart less than a year after the film was completed, *A Holy Place's* negatives still remain imprisoned in a Croatian film lab.

FULL MOON OVER BELGRADE

A rather unsuccessful attempt to marry the supernatural to real-life horror, Dragan Kresoga's *Full Moon Over Belgrade* looks and feels clumsy. He uses wartime Serbia in the mid-1990s as a background for a story about zombies on the battlefields and the vampires who are pulling the strings behind the scenes, which ends up being mostly laughable.

T.T. SYNDROME

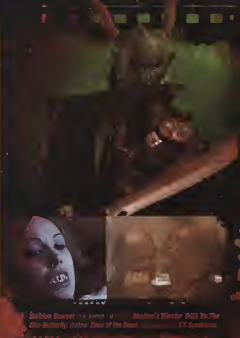
A group of young people are trapped in the old Turkish bath inside the Belgrade fortress, and a mysterious killer in a black leather jacket starts offing them one by one. It all seems to be somehow connected to a strange, rare disease, and possibly an aligator in the sewer. This giallo/slasher by Dejan Zecovic is a derivative yet pretty effective homage to B-horors with solid amounts of gore, a decent score and plenty of Dario Argento-type weirdness.

SHAJTAN'S WARRIOR

An old book of spells. An ancient Arabic demon (Djinn) overthrown in today's Belgrade. Horny teens. Parties. A nerd hungry for revenge. Lots of blood. This is a low-budget effort even by Serbia's standards, but it is full of energy, humour and action, and the makeup effects are well above average. Director Stivan Filipovic and his youthful cast give it their best.

ZONE OF THE DEAD

This Serbian co-production with Italy and Spain features an international cast headed by Ken Forre (the original *Dawn of the Dead*), who's back to slay more zombies. He's accompanied by Kristina Klebe (*Rob Zombie's Halloween*) and Armand Cabral (*JREC*). A derivative zombie flick. It deals with the accidental release of toxic matter into Serbia's most polluted city, Pancsovo, and the ensuing mayhem – an outbreak that strictly follows the routine of Italian low-budgeters from the 1980s. The over-use of shaky-cam makes decent makeup effects barely visible and the action scenes




Serbian Scores: *Strangler vs. Strangler* (1994) *Deja Vu* (1994) *A Holy Place* (1994) *Full Moon Over Belgrade* (1994) *T.T. Syndrome* (1994) *Shajtan's Warrior* (1994) *Zone of the Dead* (1994)

hard to follow, while the poor dialogue is made even more laughable by the thick accents of the Serbian actors.

TEARS FOR SALE

Tears for Sale, directed by Uros Stojanovic, boasts elements of black comedy, fantasy, Slavic gothic, action, war, drama, romance, et cetera, merged into a magical whole with baroque visuals that evoke the dark beauty trademarked by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Terry Gilliam. It is a tale of two gorgeous sisters from a village devastated by World War I and their quest for love in an environment governed by backward stupidity and death. Its script shows a softer, more obviously humorous side to the work of Aleksandar Radicevic (co-writer of *A Serbian Film*). Sadly, EuropaCorp (the film's distributor, co-owned by French filmmaker Luc Besson) cut out the subplot with the witch-grandmother's ghost who accompanies the girls.





I SEE IT PRIMARILY AS A DRAMA THAT VENTURES DOWN INTO HELL."

SRDJAN SPASOJEVIC

director character played by Sergej Trifunovic) is, what it is exactly that he's doing (what's being done to us) and it's supposed to frighten and threaten Milos (and the viewer). In the film, this scene is preceded by Vukmir's monologue, which basically explains what the scene is about – it explains the film, Serbian cinema in general, our economy and everything else, from the standpoint of all "Vukmirs" who lead us and govern our destinies guided by reasons unknown and unacceptable to me.

State censors thus far understood your intent: *Don't with the actors?*

For many, this scene has overshadowed the rest of the film and it represents a stumbling block in its reception, but for those who know how to watch a film, to make a basic distinction between positive and negative characters, and for those who are able to read the basic and not-so-hidden meanings, the rest of the film, after the MBP scene, will be stronger, more complex and emotional, more affecting and more to the point because of that scene. It has never been my aim to shock, provoke or intentionally push any barriers, which free artistic expression shouldn't have anyway. I didn't plan to break any barriers, but merely to take my deepest and most sincere feelings and ingale them right on the screen.

...about some of the other problems you've run into. Is it true that you had to leave Germany because of the film?

We did not have to leave Germany. The problem was that ARRI Film Labs in Germany refused to deliver the 35mm prints of our film, because of its content. They destroyed those prints instead. The same thing happened with the Magyar Film Lab in Budapest, although we made an effort to acquaint them with the project, and they initially agreed to do the job. It was a question of whether we'd get the film prints in time for our world premiere. Luckily, we got the prints from the Kodak CineLab in Budapest only ten days before the premiere at SXSW (South By Southwest film festival) in Austin. Problems of this kind have followed A Serbian Film from the start, and they keep following it. At London's Frightfest, the film had to be taken off the program at the last minute

because the organizers did not have enough time to prepare the version with the four minutes of cuts imposed by the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification). Right now, a Serbian state commission is investigating whether there was anything improper or illegal in the making and contents of our film.

...you'll allow your film to be put in some rotation? What do you think about such demands?

Sadly, censorship in the arts is a necessary evil that cinema has been living with for decades.

We've accepted it as a principle, and we can only fight from one case to another, hoping (with small chances) that something will be changed, but I'm afraid it'll always be there. Censorship and political correctness are so schizophrenic that they differ from one country to another, from territory to territory, from religion to religion, and after every 100 miles you encounter another "moral," "righteous" and "legal" codex which decides what's "good" for us.

Do you consider the film dangerous?

In times of the fascism of political correctness that we live in, anything can be labeled dangerous. In such times, they are free to label a film like this a nuclear threat. But let's not forget that a film can never surpass reality and that real threats are around us, carefully disguised.

Are you working on another film now, and will it share a similar aesthetic to A Serbian Film? Take a similar approach?

The approach – yes, certainly. The aesthetics – it depends on the theme and idea I'm dealing with. One thing is for sure: I'll approach each and every film I do with the same energy and attitude! I have an idea for a film that I'll work on pretty soon. It won't be as horror-like as A Serbian Film but it will have the same power and attitude that A Serbian Film has. I think that my film can open doors to many films from Serbia and quality authors coming from our country.

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ROMANTIC ENTANGLEMENTS MEET
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TOGETHER IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

BY SEAN PLUMMER

GARETH EDWARDS HAS A DILEMMA. HIS FIRST FILM AS A DIRECTOR IS CALLED *MONSTERS*, AND IT DOES CONTAIN ITS FAIR SHARE OF GIGANTIC ALIEN BEASTIES, BUT THE TITLE BELIES THE FACT THAT AT ITS HEART IS A COMPELLING ROMANCE. SO DO YOU SELL IT AS A LOVE STORY WITH MONSTERS, OR A MONSTER MOVIE WITH A LOVE STORY?

"It's a really tough one," Edwards acknowledges by phone from his home in London, England. "When you try to get money to make a film, the producers, the first thing they say is, 'Why is this different? Why do we want to make this? It's got to be different.' And you explain exactly why it would be different, and if you're lucky you go make a film that ends up

being different. Then when you present it back to them and to the marketing and sales people, they're like, 'Oh my God, what have you done? You've made something different! How are we going to market this?' I get depressed because I think, 'What are you trying to tell me? You're trying to tell me that in filmmaking every film anyone ever



makes should just be like another film that exists already, otherwise you're going to fail?" Then you slowly start to think it seems like the answer is the film doesn't feel in a box but the marketing does."

Monsters takes a pretty realistic look at what would happen if creatures from another world crash-landed on Earth. The set-up is that a NASA probe sent to collect samples of alien life crashes back to Earth over Central America. The samples give life to huge tentacled creatures, which take up residence in the jungles of Mexico and cause much havoc when they start clomping around its cities by night. Six years on, half of the country is under quarantine, treating monsters like an everyday fact of life.

Into this situation comes Andrew Kaulder (Scott McNairy), an American photojournalist working in Mexico who is unwittingly tasked with escorting his boss' daughter Samantha (Whitney Able) to the coast so she can make it back home to the States before the creatures begin their annual migration, which leaves massive destruction in its wake. But the theft of their passports and the corruption of local officials mean that their only way across the border is through Mexico's quarantined zone, a dangerous swath of land inhabited by the monsters.

Although actually inspired by Edwards' love of '50s monster movies, *Monsters'* most direct cinematic antecedents are the more recent *District 9* and *Gloverfield*, despite being conceived prior to either's release. All three use a similarly realistic approach to alien incursions, a hand-held visual aesthetic, and science-fiction and horror movie tropes to invoke hot button social and political issues such as immigration and the War on Terror. Even some of *Monsters'* ads mimic the look and feel of *D9's* outdoor advertising campaign from last summer.

Edwards, 35, sold the film to his producers as *The Blair Witch Project* meets *War of the Worlds* until *Gloverfield's* first iconic trailer hit the internet ("And then it was like, 'I can't do that!').

He thinks the comparisons to *Gloverfield* and *D9* are, if not accurate, at least understandable and ultimately unavoidable.

IT'S A
CASE OF
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IT TO
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TO HELP
BASE OUR
FANTASTIC
SCENARIO
ON."

GARETH EDWARDS

"I think the reality is that all you can really do is make your own film and not worry about everyone else because I think everyone's kind of influenced by the same things," he says. "Basically the whole *Star Wars* generation, growing up now and becoming filmmakers, we're going to be emulating that stuff when we get a chance to make a film. I think you're going to get a lot more sci-fi and a lot more horror and fantasy because now we're in charge, and we grew up through the '80s with that stuff."

Edwards honed his filmmaking skills for years working as a visual effects designer for British television but was constantly on the lookout for a good idea that he could turn into a movie cheaply. He finally came upon one during a vacation to the Maldives while watching fishermen struggle with their catch.

"I was thinking, 'I wonder what's on the other end of that net? It's so heavy.' And, in my mind, I just thought it would be really funny if this giant tentacle, like this dead sea monster, was on the end of this net. And I thought, 'Well, how hard would that be to computer generate?'"

Monsters was initially conceived as a mock documentary in which Edwards would simply overlay computer-generated monsters into everyday situations with everyday people. But as work progressed on the script, he soon realized that actual actors would be necessary. Enter Americans Able and McNairy, a real-life couple at the time of filming. Their chemistry would mutate Edwards' simple monster movie into an entirely different beast.

"Films are like children," Edwards says. "You can have a plan for them, and you want them to grow up to be a lawyer, but at some point they'll turn around and tell you no, they want to be a footballer or something.... You can ignore what the film tells you and just go, 'No, no, no, you're going to be this.' But that's when it all goes wrong. You get the best result when you're kind of responding to whatever your strengths are. And for *Monsters*, once we cast Scott and Whitney, the strength so clearly was their chemistry and their likeability. So they started to take over the film, probably more than I initially planned."

Die-Infected Zone: Samantha (Whitney Able) and Andrew (Scott McNairy) wander the post-creature wreckage.



"THE THEME OF THE FILM, WITHOUT REALIZING IT WHEN WE WERE DOING IT, IS YOU CAN'T FIGHT NATURE."

GARETH EDWARDS



With a minimal crew, Edwards shot *Monsters* in two chunks in Mexico, Central America and Galveston, Texas in autumn 2008 for a reported \$15,000 USD. The first six weeks of filming generated 100 hours of footage, which Edwards and editor Colin Goudie cut down to 90 minutes over the course of four months. The director and his actors then went back for ten additional days of filming to reshoot a few sequences and capture other coverage.

Key to keeping the budget down was Edwards' use of locals as actors. Fortunately, the Mexicans were more than willing to help a novice British director make a movie starring American actors about aliens wreaking havoc in their country.

"I can't speak Spanish, so we had a translator, and she used to do this set spiel to everybody that we bumped into... and I got to sort of memorize it in a kind of crap way," he explains. "There was this key point where the person looked really worried, like what were we asking them to do? Obviously we were going to film, and they looked really nervous. And she would be like [mimes a Spanish

phrase]. Then she'd go 'extraterrestrial,' at which point they'd suddenly smile and go, 'Oh! Okay, okay, okay!' and we'd be given permission to do whatever we wanted. For some reason, Mexicans embrace monster movies."

Edwards' determination to capture the mundane nature of an alien invasion was an important factor in his approach to the script. Rather than running in fear from the creatures every moment, the public has grown accustomed to them after six years of aliens constantly being on the news. Call it monster fatigue.

"Picture the scenario of *Jurassic Park*. Wouldn't it be amazing if they could genetically engineer dinosaurs? And the answer is yes, of course it would—for one generation. And then, after that, the next generation, they'd be born into a world that always had dinosaurs, and those kids would be going around the zoo saying, 'So, Daddy, was an elephant genetically engineered?' And you'd go, 'No, elephants were always here. It was the *Diplodocus* that was genetically engineered.' 'Oh, right. Were giraffes...?' 'No, no, just the dinosaurs, son.' And they wouldn't care! They'd all be big animals, and it wouldn't be that special."

Although *Monsters* succeeds in portraying life with alien inhabitants as commonplace, the movie is anything but ordinary in its tone. Edwards continuously amps up the terror, only giving us glimpses





Man And Monster: A mural depicts the invaders, (below) the long road home, and (opposite) filmmaker Gareth Edwards.

of the behemoths at first, showing us their capacity for destruction via destroyed buildings and the corpses left in their wake. One way in which the filmmaker sets audiences on edge is that the creatures are heard long before they are ever seen. Edwards credits sound designer Jürgen Funk and re-recording mixer Matthias Schwab for creating the disturbing sounds of the approaching aliens.

"Essentially, we just had a brief conversation about what it should sound like, and my opinion was that these things are water-based, and they come out of the water, so I was thinking of whale calls and dolphin clicks and things like that. It had this deep sea feel to it."

Aside from being simply scary, the monsters of *Monsters* also work on a metaphorical level. Some film critics have suggested that the huge wall the American government builds along the Mexican border to keep the creatures out, as well as scenes of American troops attacking the monsters, are metaphors for current topics such as immigration and the War on Terror. But Edwards insists these aspects were simply devices of narrative necessity more than an extant political agenda.

"The reality of these things is it's not as simple as the movies make out, so you use real-world scenarios to explain it, and obviously they influence the

movie a little bit," he says. "It's not like we had a political message that we wanted to ram down people's throats. It's a case of wanting it to feel real, so I used real-world scenarios to help base our fantastic scenario on."

Instead, Edwards uses the monsters as metaphors for Samantha and Andrew's relationship.

"This sounds really pretentious, but if you notice, it's six years ago this pod came down to Earth and created this problem, and it's also the sixth birthday of Andrew's kid. It's like on the same day this seed came and created this problem that he's trying to contain, and he's built a barrier up. The world's built this barrier up [too], and they're ignoring the problem. The day that he lets the barrier down and they switch off the media that's telling them it's so bad, when you see him embrace it, you then see the beauty in it."

"The theme of the film, without realizing it when we were doing it, is you can't fight nature," he continues. "It's like [Samantha and Andrew are] fighting nature by not trying to get it on with each other, and the world is fighting nature trying to not let these things out. Obviously, these things are regretful because they're trying to find a mate. They're just trying to connect, and it's exactly what these two [charac-

ters] are doing. All everyone's doing is trying to find a connection to someone else."

Aiding and abetting Edwards' storytelling is his extensive yet unobtrusive use of CGI. Instead of creating James Cameron-style wow moments, Edwards uses his visual effects background to hweek road signs, eliminate background traffic and insert his monsters in order to tell his story, not to try to make a blockbuster.

"For some reason, there are filmmakers who love that stuff and think it's great and adds excitement, but personally it just throws me out of the film. I feel like I'm watching a computer game, and that's not the kind of film that I want to do."

As to where Edwards' film fits into the lineage of creature features, he's not too sure, but hopes that *Monsters* inspires other filmmakers to use CGI creatively.

"I think there's this wave of new filmmakers, with digital and CGI filmmaking expertise—in that we've grown up with computers, we know how to do visual effects on our own—and the honeymoon's over; we



don't care anymore. We're going off and we're using these tools to make films. We don't necessarily need Hollywood. Because if you don't need loads of money to go do anything you can imagine, then there is no fear factor about playing it safe in terms of storytelling."

That said, Edwards, despite vivid thoughts that perhaps they weren't necessary to reveal, was determined to show audiences his monsters.

"It's such an old trick, this idea of 'don't show the monster, the imagination is better than reality,'" he says. "It's like when you walk down the street and you've got a girl in front of you. Every time you picture her being gorgeous, and she turns around and she's alright, even if she's average-looking. But your brain always goes straight to gorgeous. It's the same with monsters. If you don't show it, your brain imagines something way better. Now the irony is, if you were suddenly to stop the film and chuck a thousand sketch pads into the audience and say, 'Sketch what you're imagining now,' you're not really imagining any-

“I AM A MASSIVE B-MOVIE FAN, AND I GREW UP WITH SCI-FI AND HORROR. THERE'S NO WAY ON EARTH THAT I WOULD MAKE SOME SLOPPY ROMANTIC FILM.”

SIAMEN EDWARDS

thing. They couldn't draw it. There's this strange point in your brain where nothing is censored or denied but everything's very exciting with the possibilities."

Like the rest of the film, the design of *Monsters*' monsters is an invention of logic. Edwards explains that the most likely source of extraterrestrial life in our solar system is Europa, a Jovian moon whose icy surface is cracked, suggesting a volcanic core hot enough to heat the oceans under the ice, a condition nearly identical to that under which life on Earth began. Scientists have planned for years to send probes there to search for something living. Says Edwards, "I just thought, 'Well, the logical continuation is they bring the sample back, and there's every chance when it comes back to Earth, it crashes. And then that's the beginning of your monster movie.'"

Exactly what the monsters of *Monsters* look like will not be spoiled here, nor would the studio supply *Rue Morgue* with photos of the creatures anyway. A quick Google search simply fails to yield any results, a situation for which Edwards is grateful.

"I'm quite surprised because there's nothing stopping someone from going into the cinema with their iPhone and just taking a few pictures and videos even," he says. "But what's interesting is when you look on the internet, even if someone mentions a spoiler in their comment about the film, other people attack that person. Like, 'You've ruined it for me! I didn't want to know that! Thanks a lot!' I think people actually don't want to see it, don't want to know. If it feels like it's the choice of the filmmaker not to show you it, then it's part of the experience to not know it going in."

As to the film's unique blending of science fiction, horror and romance, Edwards, a self-confessed geek whose DVD collection is comprised of one-third B-movies, wants to reassure horror fans that *Monsters* is right up their darkened alley.

"When you hear there is that [romantic] element to the film, don't let it worry you. I am a massive B-movie fan, and I grew up with sci-fi and horror. There's no way on Earth that I would make some sloppy romantic film."

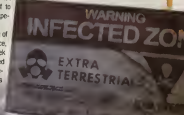
Edwards' fandom especially comes out when he talks about Ray Harryhausen, whom he met while helping a friend make a documentary on the stop-motion pioneer.

"I got to go around his house, and it was really cool because it was quite clear that I knew a lot more than this [film-maker]," he says. "So he started talking to me, and it ended up I got to hold his Oscar. The best moment was when I was chatting to him about what he thought about Peter Jackson's *King Kong* remake. He's like, 'Oh, I haven't seen anything.' ... And I just happened to have [the trailer] on my laptop. So I ended up showing Ray Harry-

hausen Peter Jackson's *King Kong* trailer. I remember putting the headphones on him and thinking, 'This has got to be a significant moment for me!' These two legends are the reason why I love monster movies, and [I'm] kind of connecting them somehow."

Likewise, Edwards hopes that horror fans connect with his low-budget epic monster movie, even if it's as much a love story as a creature feature.

"It feels like a choice, potentially annoy a lot of people who never went to see it because they didn't know about it," he rationalizes. "If you have to pick one, I'd prefer for people to see it and be annoyed with me than [to have] no one see it." ☹



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Only Women **BLEED**

BY APRIL SNELLINGS

WHILE CAROL J. CLOVER'S 1982 BOOK *MEK, WOMEN, AND CHAIN SAWS: GENDER IN THE MODERN HORROR FILM* GAVE BIRTH TO THE NOTION OF THE FEMINIST PROTAGONIST (the "Final Girl") in the slasher film, it has never been a level playing field. After all, you only get to be the Final Girl after the first girl, the penultimate girl and all the girls in between have ended up on the business end of a power tool.

Of course, we all know the rules the Final Girl must live by: she can dress, talk and fight like a man with impunity, but to make love like one or imbibe like one has long remained off limits. Filmmakers have subverted the trope for decades. Long before *Scream* earned critical kudos and box office millions by deconstructing the Final Girl and her battleground in the 1990s, the *Slumber Party Massacre* franchise laid the foundation.

The three films — recently re-released on DVD as part of Shout! Factory's Roger Corman's Cult Classics series — might seem unapologetic when viewed through the post-modern lens of movies such as *High Tension* and *Behind the Mask*, but *SPM* and its two official sequels occupy an important niche in horror's cultural landscape. A full decade before Clover's book, *SPM* recognized the Final Girl trope and turned it on its bloody ear.

The first film was released in 1982 — the year that saw *Heavenly Creatures* joined *E.T.* as one of the top box office earners, and the *Friday* the 13th and *Halloween* series both released their third installments, the previous year had already given us such cult faves as *The Burning* and *My Bloody Valentine*. The slasher genre was thriving, and legendary exploitation producer Roger Corman was eager to cash in.

At the same time, a young editor was looking to make her directorial debut. Amy Holden Jones, then 26, found a strange little curiosity gathering dust in whatever passed for a vault at Corman's New World Pictures: a horror script by feminist author Rita Mae Brown, best known for her lesbian coming-of-age novel *Rubyfruit Jungle* (think *Catcher in the Rye* with more oral sex). The script, titled *Don't Open the Door*, was intended as a feminist take on the slasher genre. Without bothering to ask permission, Jones enlisted a few student actors and her cinematographer husband, Michael Chapman, to shoot a prologue for the script. Jones cut the reel together on her pal Joe Dante's editing table, using music cues from Dante's *The Howling*. Chapman, a noted cinematographer, was fresh from shooting *Raging Bull*, so the prologue looked damn good — good enough to convince Corman to commit \$200,000 to complete the film and hire Jones to direct it.

"I did it as a directing sample only. I was shocked when Roger decided he wanted me to finish the film," recalls Jones. "I had never even read the rest of the script. When I did, I realized it was a mess. That was also the beginning of my career as a screenwriter, as the first thing I did was rewrite."

Since Jones had never been a slasher fan, she had serious catching up to do.

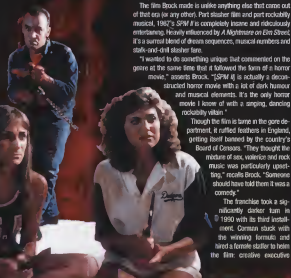
She recalls, "When I sat down and looked at *Halloween* and *Friday* the 13th, I realized how derivative [Brown's] original script was. I sat out to both fulfill the requirements of the genre and make it somewhat unique. I was afraid of making something politically incorrect, but I also re-oriented the label. By this time, directors like Francis Ford Coppola, Jonathan Demme and Martin Scorsese had all made exploitation films for Corman, so why not me?"

Jones doesn't remember much about Brown's original script — only that there was a slumber party and a killer with a big, um, drill. According to her, Brown's take on the genre was a fairly serious one, so she added liberal doses of humor.

Don't Open the Door was written by Rita Mae Brown and directed by Amy Holden Jones. The film was released by Shout! Factory.

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**SPM DIRECTOR
AMY HOLDEN JONES**



"The rewrite was enormous," she recalls. "I wrote all the set pieces, changed or created all the deaths, and reworked most of the characters. But the drill metaphor is Brown's. Most good horror scripts are a metaphor for an underlying fear. This one is about a teenage girl's terror of getting laid for the first time."

In true Corman fashion, *SPM* was shot in only twenty days. The crew had to be resourceful, since Corman's business model didn't allow for extravagant luxuries, such as, well, sets and electricity. "Sometimes Roger would take away our generator, saying we could light scenes using car headlights," Jones says. "Those days our grips would tap into city power lines. You could see the streetlights dim for miles."

Helped along by its iconic, phallic poster (Jones also directed the poster's photo shoot — see the iconic image on facing page), *SPM* was a success, which could only mean one thing: a sequel. This time around, directorial duties fell to Deborah Brock, who was head of post-production at Corman's company. Brock had written a comedy script that failed to raise Corman's interest, but he offered her a chance to direct a film he'd already sold to European distributors on its title alone: *Slumber Party Massacre II*. There was no script to go along with the title, though, so she wrote one.

"As long as it was a horror movie involving high school girls and a drill, I could make it pretty much what I wanted it to be," Brock recalls. "It was originally called *Don't Let Go Slumber Party Massacre II*. We dropped the last part of the title while shooting because people don't particularly want to rent their house to a movie with the word 'Massacre' in the title."

So, was Corman's selection of a female director for the sequel intentional or coincidental? Brock isn't certain, but she hears a guess: "Roger is very on-sexist. He's given more women first jobs as directors and producers than anyone in Hollywood. I don't know that he had hiring a woman specifically in mind, but he was always open to it. I think, really, Roger had a problem — he'd already sold the rights to the picture and he had to get it made. I told him I wanted to write and direct, and it was a match."

The film Brock made is unlike anything else that came out of that era (or any other). Part slasher film and part rockabilly musical, 1983's *SPM II* is completely insane and ridiculously entertaining. Heavily influenced by *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, it's a surreal blend of dream sequences, musical numbers and stalk-and-drill slasher fare.

"I wanted to do something unique that commented on the genre at the same time that it followed the form of a horror movie," asserts Brock. "[*SPM II*] is actually a deconstructed horror movie with a lot of dark humor and musical elements. It's the only horror movie I know of with a singing, dancing rockabilly villain."

Though the film is tame in the gore department, it ruffled feathers in England, getting itself banned by the country's Board of Censors. "They thought the mixture of sex, violence and rock music was particularly upsetting," recalls Brock. "Someone should have told them it was a comedy."

The franchise took a significantly darker turn in 1990 with its third installment. Corman stuck with the winning formula and hired a female staffer to helm the film: creative executive



**“IT’S THE ONLY HORROR MOVIE I
KNOW OF WITH A SINGING, DANCING
ROCKABILLY VILLAIN.”**

**SPM II DIRECTOR
DEBORAH BROCK**



Sally Matison, who had expressed an interest in directing. When he offered her the reins on *SPM II*, she quickly accepted, deciding to abandon the comedic tone of the first two films.

"I was somewhat uncomfortable with the depiction of violence in slasher films, arguably solely for entertainment value, and about violence in entertainment more generally," she says. "I decided that if I were being asked to make a slasher film, I would give people what they seemed to want—more than they wanted, maybe, to get them to think about it. There is one very dark scene near the end of the film, when a character is cornered and killed, that was added after principal photography. Initially the scene was very brief. The film was running short, and my modification is that Roger specifically wanted that scene lengthened and made more graphic. That is the scene that I'm most uncomfortable with. I'm not sure if I succeeded at all in getting people to think about the violence, particularly violence against women, the way I hoped to."

The franchise's influence is undeniable: the *SPM* films inspired a plethora of what filmmaker Jason Paul Collum (director of *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacre* documentary) calls the "girls in bloody nighties leg of horror"—movies such as *Slumber House Massacre 1 and 2* (which even incorporated footage from *SPM*), *The Sandy Hook Lighthouse Party Massacre*, *Psycho Sleepover*, *The Last Slumber Party*, *House on Sorority Row*, *The Stay Awake* and even *The Sorority House Slumber Party Massacre*. Though the original franchise came to an end with its third installment, the series enjoyed something of a revival in 2003 with Jim Wynorski's *Cherise Massacre*, which was co-produced by Corman and originally titled *SPM V*. Though the title was eventually changed and the film has little in common with the series that inspired it, it did manage to revive one of the original film's ill-fated characters. Linda, played by veteran horror actress Brinke Stevens, had a presumably fatal run-in with escaped mental patient Russ Thom in *SPM*, but apparently got better in time to make an appearance in *CM*.

"Back when I'd first heard about *SPM II*, I asked if I could be in it—and the reply was, 'But Brinke, you're dead!'" In truth, you never actually saw me die, only heard a horrible off-camera scream."

Stevens was eager to reprise her role for Wynorski's spinoff, even if the part wasn't quite as meaty as she would have liked. "I wish they'd had time to put some scars on my arms or chest to allude to my past trauma," she says. "As it is, I'm remarkably unscarred... except perhaps mentally."

Nearly 30 years after the release of the original *SPM*, viewers remain sharply divided about the franchise's feminist trappings. To many, the films represent a rarity in the genre; besides being the only horror franchise helmed exclusively by women, the first installment, in particular, flips many of the genre's typical gender roles.

"The stereotypical roles are reversed, with the girls being smart and strong, while the boys are more effeminate and constantly making poor decisions," says Collum, whose three-part documentary is included with the re-release. "Lots of female empowerment with women doing 'men's' jobs like carpentry, telephone repair, etc. And, in the post-Halloween world of Jamie Lee Curtis fighting back, these girls pick up power tools and use them... they fight for survival."

"It's definitely there," says Brock, of *SPM II*'s feminist subtext. "Amy Holden Jones and Rita Mae Brown started it with the original *Slumber Party Massacre* and then Roger just continued with the women writer/directors. The young women in *SPM II* are independent and do and say what they want with a lot of freedom. Also, they are the ones who have to solve their problem in the end. There are no men to come to their rescue—they're all dead or have rejected the whole idea of the 'problem,' as in the local police. In the end, Courtney has to face her own fears in the Dealer Killer—who definitely represents a type of deranged masculinity—and destroy him."

Matison expresses a similar desire to address the genre's treatment of women in her film. In particular, she wanted to do away with the familiar trope of the promiscuous girl being the first to die. "That bothered me as an unfair, double standard punishment of female sexuality," she remembers. "In *SPM II*, the most promiscuous girl of the bunch doesn't get bumped off first; she lasts a while. I tried to partly spend what I saw as the conventions of the genre, while working within it."

The franchise's detractors, on the other hand, offer a more cynical explanation: the films are perceived as feminist horror movies only because Corman was shrewd enough to market them as such.

"At the time of its release [*SPM*] was attacked by feminists, but that is absurd," Jones says. "More boys die on camera, by far, than girls, and far more brutally, as well. This is the nature of the genre. It's not about violence against women per se, any more than *The Omen* is about child abuse. I was a young feminist then and I'm a middle-aged one now. There were precious few strong women on screen at that point. I've made a whole career of trying to change that. This was the beginning, humble though it may be."

By Curt Gelsa III

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY 31

HE WENT THROUGH HELL AND BACK

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AN ARMY OF ZOMBIES!

GREGORY LAMBERSON

THE JAKE HELMAN FILES

PERSONAL DEMONS

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"Chock-full of witchcraft and mental illness; a great combination for horror. What ultimately happens is surprising, and that's the mark of a good book. I liked it and recommend it."

— Horror Fiction Review

THE 2010 TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL PREVIEWED SOME
OF THE MOST ANTICIPATED AND
UNDER-THE-RADAR GENRE MOVIES.
ADJUST YOUR ANTICIPATION
ACCORDINGLY, FRIGHT FANS...

HORROR COMES TO HOGTOWN

BY DAVID LEE
DAVE ALEXANDER, STUART F. ANDREWS,
TODD BROWN, LISA LAPOUCEUR AND TREVOR TUMINSKI

BLACK SWAN USA

Barren Aronofsky

Darren Aronofsky shows off his giallo side with this story of ballet, lesbian sex, mental breakdown and a whole lot of brilliance. *Black Swan* starts off quietly, slowly building atmosphere and tension until it gets to the third act, at which point all restraint is thrown to the wayside and Aronofsky lets loose. The end result is one hell of a psychological thriller built on a trio of fantastic performances that left audiences wondering whether it will be Aronofsky or star Natalie Portman who will get Oscar noms or if both will be taking home the hardware. **B**

COLO FISH USA

Sion Sono

Loosely based on the true story of a Japanese serial killer, *Cold Fish* depicts a troubled family whose fortunes are forever changed when the eccentric owner of a tropical fish store enters their lives and turns out to be a homicidal maniac. This is Sion Sono's metaphorical portrait of the frustrated and thwarted desires of domestic life manifested as bloody, operatic splatter. It's a testament to what happens when a filmmaker is free to explore his dark imaginings without self-censorship and tiresome clichés. These remake and nostalgia-driven American filmmakers need to watch this immediately to grasp the full extent of their artistic delinquency. **C+**

GOOD NEIGHBOURS Canada

Jacob Tierney

Jumping from a high school comedy (*The Docks*) to serial killers, director Jacob Tierney turned in the biggest surprise of TIFF with *Good Neighbours*. Set against the backdrop of the 1995 Quebec referendum, it's the story of three Anglophones living in a Montreal neighbourhood that's being stalked by a serial killer. Star Jay Baruchel bragged earlier at the FanTasia Festival that it contained the most shocking onscreen kill

of the year and while it doesn't—that honour goes to *A Serbian Film*—it's not far off. More importantly, it offers some genuine surprises and great performances. **B-**

A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE USA

Adam Wingard

In this dreary American indie, a woman tries to put her life back on track after she discovers her boyfriend is a serial killer, and consequently struggles through a bout of alcoholism. Beautifully presented out of chronological order and boasting an epic, transcendental score, *A Horrible Way to Die* is much more stylized and elegantly crafted than its sensationalistic title would suggest. Director Adam Wingard (*Pap Stout*) has created a flowing fever dream of a film swash in rich performances, dark humour, compelling storytelling and other titillate marks of a filmmaker destined for greatness. **T**

INSIDIOUS USA

James Wan

Director James Wan (*Saw*, *Dead Silence*) takes the high road early in what begins as a dead serious, modern haunted house thriller in the vein of *Poltergeist*. By ripping slow genre conventions in the bud and jettisoning the cheap jump scares, Wan turns in some truly unsettling sequences that will test your skin's ability to stay on the late-night audience members at the Midnight Madness program were jumping out of their seats). Cautious then that *Insidious* switches gears at the midway point with the introduction of two wisecracking paranormal investigators and some hammy *Batman*-inspired humour. The tonal shift abandons the title's implied eeriness and lessens its impact, but the balance of familiarity, fresh ideas and vivid cinematography will definitely stick with you. **T**

I SAW THE DEVIL South Korea

Ji-woon Kim

Heavily censored in South Korea, *I Saw the Devil's* reputation preceded it for TIFF audiences eager to see the uncensored festival version. Half serial killer movie/half

thoughtful revenge film, the latest by Ji-woon Kim (*A Tale of Two Sisters*) stars Byung-hun Lee as a secret agent whose fiancée is dismembered by a particularly sadistic serial killer (*Oldboy* star Min-sik Choi). After using his skills to track down the murderer, our hero decides to hunt him slowly (and painfully), but when his game gets out of control, the scenario is flipped. Elements of *Se7en* and *Saw*, with extra sadism and gore, made this accomplished chiller-thriller a festival highlight. **T**

JULIA'S EYES Spain

Culliam Morales

How do you spell giallo in Spanish? "D-o-e-T-o-o-o" The genre icon has produced this quietly creepy combination of a woman haunted by both the onset of blindness (which may have killed her twin sister) and an invisible stranger (who may have killed her sister). Belén Rueda (*The Orphanage*) stars as the thriller mad victim/heroine, rising to the challenge of spending it good chunk of the film blindfolded. A suspenseful noir with some intense ocular trauma, it ultimately goes off the rails at the end, with a final shot that will have you shrieking, not shivering. **T**

THE LAST CIRCUS Spain, France

Álex de la Iglesia

The director of *Day of the Beast* and *Acción Mutante* takes a grotesque, baroque tour of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, as experienced by a troupe of circus performers. Innocence lost is embodied in Iglesia's film as a meek, chubby clown who transforms into a seething pot of self-mutilating rage in an attempt to save the woman he loves. *The Last Circus* is a sprawling, genre-defying beast that is also Iglesia's best in more than a decade. **B+**

L.A. ZOMBO America, USA, France

Bruce La Bruce

While Gaspar Noé and Harmony Korine make cult films for a marginal audience, Bruce La Bruce (*Outa, Or, Up*)

with *Dead People*) is making them far almost no audience whatsoever! His latest genre outing continues his fascination with the weird intersection between sex and gore. It stars gay porn sensation François Saget as an undead fiend who reanimates his human prey, then creates new orifices in their desecrated corpses to have his horny way with. Prior to the screening, La Bruce confessed that a Toronto website gave *L.A. Zombie* zero stars but, as the filmmaker explained, "For a gay porn, trash director, zero stars is four stars!" **BFA**

THE LEGEND OF BEAVER DAM

Canada, USA

Jerome Sable

It's rare for a short to play *Midnight Madness*, but this twelve-minute splatter comedy was a no-brainer crowd-pleaser. In it, a bullied geek on a camping trip battles a one-armed slasher killer to save his fellow scouts. Gore galore, great makeup, hilarious one-liners and musical numbers = instant classic. **BFA**

MACHETE MAIDENS UNLEASHED!

Australia

Mark Hartley

The director of acclaimed *Quarantine* doc *Not Quite Hollywood* aims his lens at the berserk period of '70s and '80s Filipino film production which, thanks to the country's lax labour laws and exotic locales, attracted an avalanche of exploitation auteurs, giving rise to such unforgettable grinchhouse fare as *The Big Doll House*, *TNT Jackson*, *For Your Height Only* and perhaps the ultimate Filipino exploitation film: *Apocalypse Now!* Boasting extensive interviews with lurid luminaries such as Roger Corman, Joe Dante, Sid Haig and John Landis, *Machete Maidens* assaults the audience with as many car crashes, fist fights, death-defying stunts, bodily dismemberments and juggling females as its predecessor. **BFA**

RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE

Norway, France, Sweden

Joel Mari Rønneberg

Holiday acrogues will especially love the story of a mischievous boy named Petteri whose hunter-gatherer father and his friends find their seasonal take failed by workers at a nearby drill site — one which just so happens to have exhumed the frozen body of Santa Claus! Rooted in the notion that St. Nick isn't the jolly, old fellow we've come to know and love but rather a hideous, ball-busting prick who spansks naughty kids into oblivion, the cartoonish, highly cinematic caper pits Petteri and the hunters against an army of murderous Santa look-alikes

elves in a fun (though not really for kids) anti-holiday holiday movie. **TT**

RED NIGHTS

Hong Kong, China, France

Julien Carbon, Laurent Courtiaud This stylish fusion of psychosexual thriller with Hong Kong espionage action has a lot going for it: seductive, sinister Carrie Ng (*Waked Killer*) as Carrie, a rich, crazy Dragon Lady in search of an ancient seal filled with a paralyzing poison/aphrodisiac; a kinky opening sequence that will have latex fetishists gasping for air; extreme torture involving rope bondage, jade claws and fayed flesh, etc. So why was it putting the *Midnight* crowds to sleep? Perhaps the first-time French directors were so pre-occupied with orchestrating their stunning set pieces they forgot that plot is also sexy. **LL**

STAKE LAND USA

Jim Mickle

This beautifully tensed western/noir movie/coming-of-age drama wrapped in a vampire apocalypse tale was a revelation for most of the *Midnight Madness* audience, who voted *Stake Land* The Cadillac People's Choice *Midnight Madness* award winner. The second collaboration from Jim Mickle (director, co-writer) and Nick Damici (star, co-writer), who also made *Mulberry Street*, *Stake Land* is a measured, lyrical tale that sees the John Wayne-like Mieter (Damic), his young sidekick (Connor Paolo), a nun (Kelly McGillis) and others trying to survive feral vamps, ruthless fundamentalists and the rugged landscape itself. Plenty of action, blood and original tweaks on bloodsucker mythology make it an American indie horror film triumph. (Note: TIFF's other vampire film, *Let Me In*, has been released and is reviewed in the CineMacabre section on p.38.) **BFA**

VANISHING ON 7TH STREET

Brad Anderson

From the man who brought us *The Machinist* and *Section 8* comes *Midnight Madness'* most promising premise: darkness falls on the world, and where once were people now lay only creepy piles of clothing. This apocalyptic siege film about deadly shadows starring Hayden Christensen and John Leguizamo hints at a terrifying take on the Rapture but delivers only repetitive scenes in which a few survivors try to outwit what looks like the black smoke cloud from *Looney* using glow sticks. No one knows why this has happened, or why they don't just light some oil drum fires. Disappointing. **LL**



TIFF Blast: (clockwise from top) Various posters from genre moviefest *Midnight Madness*; *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale*; *Vanishing on 7th Street*; *Red Nights*; *Stake Land*; and *The Legend of Beaver Dam*.



My Horror Favourite

Dani Filth **REVEALS HIS BAND'S NEW ALBUM**
BASTARD THE DEMONSLAD **CHOICES** **IN HIS**
TOP TEN FAVOURITE WOMEN IN HORROR MOVIES

Dani Filth **vs** Trevor Tumisha

THIS MONTH, ONE OF THE UK'S MOST NOTORIOUS METAL BANDS, CRADLE OF FILTH, RELEASES ITS NINTH STUDIO EFFORT, *DARKLY, DARKLY, VENUS AVERSA* (NOVEMBER 9 ON NUCLEAR BLAST RECORDS/SONIC UNION) – AN EROTIC, NIGHTMARISH CONCEPT ALBUM CENTRED ON ADAM'S FIRST WIFE, THE DEMONESS LILITH.

"She's been a character that's hid, a bit serpent-like, behind the band in the shadows for as long as I can remember," says singer Dani Filth. "At [the new album's] heart is essentially a Gothic horror novel along the lines of the books I love from the turn of the 20th century, late 19th century, Very English!"

This isn't the first time Cradle of Filth has expressed a fondness for the fairer sex. Take *Cruelty and the Beast*, the band's 1996 album based on

the femme fatalism of Hungarian "blood countess" Elizabeth Bathory, or its 2004 effort *Nymphetamine* (the title track of which Filth once referred to as "a drug-like addiction to the woman in question..."), and you get the idea that the English band enjoys venerating the ladies.

To mark the release of the new album, *AM* asked Filth to give us a run-down of his top ten favourite women in horror movies, and he obliged, noting, "The top ten are definitely, solely and humbly [chosen] because of their acting ability in the genre or the fact that they've become important icons whether I like it or not." He adds, "I like them all anyway. They obviously get the roles for being [beautiful], so it comes as part and parcel, doesn't it? Sex and horror!"

- 1 Monica Bellucci
- 2 Elsa Lanchester
- 3 Barbara Steele

"Not only is she beautiful and very vampish but she appeared as one of the brides in one of my favourite films, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* [1992]. I know people will mock it and say that it's a bit cheesy but I love the cinematography of it; it just looks beautiful. It had some amazing performances and it was a magical step. *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was another one of her; a Gothic horror gem I discovered by accident and was just blown over by it. It was an amazing film, an epic almost. Then there's irreversible, which I would deem a horror film."

"Not because of the amount of stuff she did really, but just because she became so iconic with the imagery. Like Yvonne De Carlo [*The Muppet*] even. Elsa Lanchester as the Bride of Frankenstein: I've got the huge horror compendium and it's just her head on the front, which kind of sums it up. Leads of women dress up as [her] when they go to horror-themed parties – it's the hair, isn't it? The iconic nature of it. As soon as you see her, you know what genre you're in and what she represents."

"She's another iconic-looking actress. Often misconstrued as being Italian because she was dubbed in a lot of things and she did a lot of Italian cinema. Literally, I think one of her quotes was, 'I never want to climb out of another fucking coffin again,' which I liked. She's got such an extensive filmography; my favourite film she ever did is *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Roger Corman. I just love that movie. It's the colours, it's the theme, the Gothic nature of it, it's the darkest of Corman's Poe adaptations."



- 4 Melissa George

[Laughs] "Well, she's cute and she's actually forging herself a horror career in such a short span of time. [I] always remember her from being in a dreadful soap called *Home and Away* – an Aussie soap right up there with *Neighbours*. It was awful. But then she did *The Arabyelle Horror* [2005], *Brides*, *Wiz* [released as *The Killing Gene* in North America], which resembled a stem *Saw* – in fact, I thought [the title] was just 'Saw' in reverse – *30 Days of Night* and *Twilight*, which my daughter, who's only eleven, loves, so I thought [including her] was kind of putting the cat amongst the pigeons."



5 Pamke Janssen

"Well, 100 Feet was a bit naïf but she was great in *House on Haunted Hill* (1999) and, a film I really love, *Deep River*. It's like a cross between *The Evil Dead* and... I dunno, some boat movie." [Laughs]



6 Ingrid Pitt

"We utilized her on our album based on Elizabeth Bathory, called *Cruelty and the Beast*, and she reprised her [titular] role as Countess Dracula, which I think is the first film for Hammer that actually featured a nude woman in it. She's just cool and she's really into horror. She's written books about ghosts and vampires ever since giving up her movie career. *The Vampire Lovers*, *The Wicker Man*, the Amicus film *The House that Dropped Blood*—everyone assumes Countess Dracula to be raven-haired and yet you have this strange Hungarian blond woman portraying her. Her life was very interesting as well. She was in a Nazi war camp and escaped by swimming the Danube or something ridiculous. She's had quite a hectic life."



7 Sheri Moon Zombie

"I think, because of the ties with her husband [Rob Zombie], she's obviously forging a path in this kind of thing despite mainly only being in his films. She's in *Toolbox Murders* (2004), as well. I think she's made quite an impression on people and, really, her career's only begun. She probably lives with corpses too, so that's a plus, isn't it?"



8 Sigourney Weaver

"You've got the whole *Alien* legacy, well... the three and a half good ones at least. (I'm not going to mention that *Avatar* movie. I doubt anyone's heard of it anyway.) She definitely led the way for the powerful, female archetype, like Milla Jovovich in the *Resident Evil* films; the survivor — that's what she represents. And she looked good!" [Laughs]



10 Asia Argento

"Obviously, the daughter of Dario Argento. I did a track for *The Third Mother* (released as *The Mother of Tears* in North America). I didn't get to meet her but I've seen a lot of her films, like *Torrey*, *The Phantom of the Opera* (1998), *XXX* (unfortunately), *The Keeper*—which is a strange film with Dennis Hopper. She's been in some dreadful films, like *Land of the Dead*, which wasn't brilliant. Another person that's kind of a horror diva though."

Honourable Mentions:

Lynne Quigley ("Just because she was on my wall when I was a kid. She was like a pin-up."), Caroline Munro, Nobuko Kuroki, Milla Jovovich, Matsushita Herobridge and Tippi Hedren ("Just because of *The Birds*. I had a bit of a crush").

9 Janet Leigh/Jamie Lee Curtis

"The mother-daughter combo. Although [Leigh] was only in *Psycho*, that was such a monumental piece of celluloid, it was so brilliantly done: you're watching a movie about a woman, and she's the main character, and suddenly she gets killed off halfway through and you have to literally start the film again with someone else. It was such a pivotal moment and, for that, she should be recognized. ... Jamie Lee Curtis, obviously, for *Halloween* (1978), *The Fog* (1980), *Passion Night* (1980), et cetera. She was even in *Halloween II: Season of the Witch*. She calls up as the operator's voice, I believe."



CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



ANOTHER AXE TO GRIND

HATCHET II

Starring Danielle Harris, Tony Todd and Kane Hodder
Written and directed by Adam Green
Dark Sky

In 2006, writer/director Adam Green promised a return to "old-school American horror" with *Hatchet*, the tale of a swamp-dwelling, deformed killer named Victor Crowley and the boat full of unlucky tourists who trespass in his waters. Hailed by some and reviled by others, the film was successful enough to warrant a sequel, one whose tagline could simply be "More." More humour, more horror vet cameos and, most notably, more gore – so much, in fact, that Dark Sky Films is bypassing the ratings board completely to release *Hatchet II* unrated, a move that resulted in the film being yanked by the AMC theatre chain after two days! (No definitive answers why as of press time.)

Hatchet II picks up moments after the end of its predecessor as Marybeth (Danielle Harris of *Stake Land*, taking over the role from Tamara Feldman) escapes Crowley's clutches and gets out of the swamp... only to immediately re-enter it alongside

Reverend Zombie (Tony Todd) and a posse of hunters out for Crowley's head. Though we learn more of the killer's origins this time 'round, the film is as light on plot as the original. It's a slasher flick broken down to its most basic elements: a group of people head out to an isolated area, some of them have sex and nearly everyone dies at the hands of a hulking maniac.

Hatchet II isn't about substance, it's about crazy kills and over-the-top gore, and here it really delivers. The screen is bathed in blood as Crowley off his victims in ways that will leave your mouth hanging open in shock, and will have gorehounds pissing their pants in delight. Aside from the viscera, though, it's Harris who adds a sorely needed note of gravity to the film. By turns tough, distraught and terrified, she proves that her status as a genre icon is no fluke.

What *Hatchet II* is lacking is scares. While it never devolves completely into a wink-wink horror in-joke, it also doesn't seem particularly interested in terrifying us, as evidenced by the lack of atmospheric dread and tension, despite the swamp's evocative environment.

Your feelings for *Hatchet*, whatever they may be, will likely carry over to the sequel. If you're in the

mood for brainless fun, it'll satisfy. With *Hatchet II*'s explicit gore, Adam Green has made the word "unrated" – a term used so readily these days that it no longer has any resonance – notorious again and that, at least, is to be lauded.

STACIE POMDER

TWICE BITTEN

LET ME IN

Starring Kodi Smit-McPhee, Chloë Grace Moretz
and Richard Jenkins
Written and directed by Matt Reeves
Overture

Let Me In is undeniably accomplished, especially when compared to the recent crop of criminally disappointing remakes. However, considering how closely it treads to both Tomas Alfredson's 2008 version and author John Ajvide Lindqvist's original screenplay, one can't help but wonder if the English-language redo was really necessary. In the end, I guess it all comes down to how much you hate reading subtitles.

While the characters' names have changed – Oskar and Eli become Owen and Abby – the narrative remains remarkably similar. Child vampire Abby (Chloë Grace Moretz: *Kick-Ass*) moves into an apartment complex with "her guardian" (Richard Jenkins, credited here as "The Father") and befriends bullied youth Owen (Kodi Smit-McPhee: *The Road*). Then, when Jenkins' character fails to obtain blood



for Abby and ends up in a car wreck that threatens to expose them both, he douses himself with acid to keep her secret, and his charge suddenly finds herself all alone, save for Owen, who soon learns what she actually is and must now step up to protect her.

The cast is roundly superb, and throughout the film writer/director Matt Reeves channels Alfredson's original, even virtually duplicating many key scenes, including the snowy playground encounters, the hospital room inferno and the rec centre swimming pool massacre. In fact, he brings little of his own vision to the proceedings, and what he does add delivers mixed results. For instance, while

changing the locale of the acid bath from a nearly deserted locker room to a cramped, crumpled car is suitably effective, the decision to use CG to showcase Abby's vampiric powers – so she leaps around unnaturally, like a apostic monkey – seriously mars the film. Yes, despite the fact that this is a

Hammer production, it still suffers from American remake-itis, in that many of the subtler elements of the original have been punched up here, seemingly in a desire to sate North America's need for bigger, badder, bloodier. Only this film doesn't require any of that because it's the story that's the driving force here, not the effects.

Let Me In is far from a remake travesty, but it won't be usurping the still-superior *Let The Right One In* as the go-to modern vampire classic either.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

ELEVATOR TO HELL

DEVIL

Starring Chris Messina, Logan Marshall-Green

and Jenny O'Hara

Directed by John Erick Dowdle

Written by Brian Koppelman and M. Night Shyamalan
Universal

Even prior to his last few box office abortions (*Lady in the Water*, *The Happening*, *The Last Airbender*), I'd thought it was high time M. Night Shyamalan try directing someone else's script rather than sully his otherwise competent work as a director with another poorly told, twist-laden supernatural tale. Turns out it was stepping away from the director's chair that would improve the prolific filmmaker's critical fortunes.

Capitalizing on the fear of being trapped in an elevator, *Devil* wastes little time ensnaring five strangers in a high-rise lift, only hours after a chilling bit of foreshadowing involving a suicide jumper who swan dives from the building's upper reaches. The sequestered passengers – a claustrophobic security guard, a cranky old lady, a wisecracking salesman, a pretty young woman and a good-looking mystery man – begin to turn on each other as the flickering lights, a lack of communication with the outside



Devil: A security guard (Bokenije) has his just come back to haunt him.

world and inter-group suspicion escalates until one of them is curiously wounded and, before long, another is dead. Suddenly it's a police matter.

A nearly subliminal demonic visage on the surveillance footage leads one particularly religious building official – who also serves as the movie's narrator – to suggest that not everybody in the elevator is who they seem, and that the Devil has gathered them for due penance. Police detective Bowden (Chris Messina) brushes him off as a spiritual nut but as the shadows of the passengers' pasts start to take shape, he begins to rethink his skepticism.

Reminiscent of an episode of *The Twilight Zone* or Alfred Hitchcock Presents, this morality tale is arguably the best work involving Shyamalan since *The Sixth Sense* or *Unbreakable*. Though not perfect – there is, exactly, a twist that has things up just a little too neatly, and some cockamamie theory regarding proof of the Devil's involvement – director John Erick Dowdle (*Quarantine*) keeps the suspense well-measured, the acting sufficiently believable and underlines the simplicity of the story's setting with an eerie score by Fernando Velázquez (*Julie's Eyes*, *The Orphanage*). If the movie's message is accurate – that everybody eventually gets their comeuppance – then maybe this decent offering is our reward for sitting through the last few Shyamalan indelible ones.

TREVOR TUMINSKI

ALICE IN ZOMBIELAND

RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE

Starring Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter and Wentworth Miller
Written and directed by Paul W.S. Anderson

Sony

Like a rotting zombie in search of fresh brains, the fourth installment of the *Resident Evil* franchise lurches into theatres, and this time it's in 3-D.

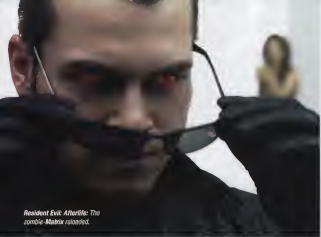
Picking up where the previous film left off, *After-Me* opens with a bang as Alice (Milla Jovovich) and her army of clones attack the Umbrella Corporation headquarters in Tokyo. Though it's extremely reminiscent of the pulse-pounding lobby scene in *The Matrix* (complete with bullet-time slo-mo effects), once the explosions and blood spurting have subsided, it trails off into a meandering, boring narrative about Alice searching for

Aracade, the infection-free sanctuary hinted at in the last film, *RE: Extinction*. The action doesn't pick back up again until the halfway mark, when Alice accidentally stumbles onto a group of survivors holed up in a maximum-security prison surrounded by hordes of hungry gut-munchers.

Fans of the video games might enjoy seeing familiar characters Chris and Claire Redfield bottle Umbrella head honcho Albert Wesker, but the real star of the show is a frightening new fend from the *RE:5* video game known as the Ex-cubator – a hulking zombie boss armed with a gigantic, deadly axe festooned with grappling hooks, chains and sharpened spikes.

Paul W.S. Anderson, who helmed the original film adaptation in 2002, assumes directorial duties again, this time utilizing the 3-D camera system that James Cameron developed for *Avatar*. Translation: This is not a film that had the 3-D effects added as an afterthought (like the *Clash of the Titans* remake). As a result, explosions, bullets and throwing stars seem to leap right out at your face. There are times, however, when you'll completely forget that the film is in 3-D, as a lot of the action is set in the dark,





Resident Evil: Afterlife: The zombie Matrix reloads.

cramped corridors of the prison, where it just doesn't work.

Ultimately, *Afterlife* is nothing more than a string of cool action sequences backed by a pulsating techno soundtrack, but, of course, deep storylines and serious character arcs aren't why we go to see zombie movies. So pass the popcorn and release the inside-out hounds!

LAST CHANCE LANCE

A BAD SEED FINALLY SPROUTS

CASE 39

Starring Renée Zellweger, Jodelle Ferland and Ian McShane
Directed by Christian Alvart
Written by Ray Wright
Paramount

Case 39 began production back in 2006, and after years of shuffling and rescheduling has finally been unleashed upon a world that finds itself indifferent at best. In the minds of audiences, a long-delayed release date indicates trepidation on the part of the studio, which usually means the movie sucks (though there are exceptions, such as the excellent, but still unreleased 2006 slasher *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane*).

Renée Zellweger stars as Emily Jenkins, a social worker with a conscience as large as the stack of

files on her desk. She becomes particularly engrossed in case #39, which concerns Lilith (Jodelle Ferland), a sweet and shy ten-year-old whose parents have promised to "send her to hell." If this was a made-for-women's-television movie, then it would be about Emily rescuing the girl and fighting the court system for custody so Lilith could become the daughter she never knew she wanted. But *Case 39* is a horror movie, so Emily rescues the girl only to discover — too late — that Lilith's parents wanted to kill her in order to save themselves... from her. *Dreadwood*'s Ian McShane joins the fun as a defective trying to get to the bottom of things.



Lilith's nature is revealed, and director Christian Alvart (*Pandorum*, *Arbitrage*) engages in some dodgy

The movie doesn't particularly tread any new ground in the "killer kid" subgenre, although the first half is an especially enjoyable slow burn along the lines of *Joshua* (2007) or any number of late-1970s flicks such as *The Exorcist* or *The Haunting of Julia*. The simplistic approach and directorial restraint shown early on devolve a bit as

(and wholly unnecessary) digital effects. As anyone who saw *Silent Hill* can attest, Ferland is capable of quiet, creepy menace; unfortunately, the film overstates its welcome and Lilith's actions never live up to her promised threats.

Whether or not you want to add *Case 39* to your workload depends on how much love you bear for those maniacal munchins.

• STACIE PONDER

SHOULDA RAISED THE... STAKES

30 DAYS OF NIGHT: DARK DAYS

Starring Kiele Sanchez, Mia Kirschner and Rhys Coiro
Directed by Ben Ketai
Written by Ben Ketai and Steve Niles
Sony

Fact: The only thing more abundant than horror movie sequels are straight-to-DVD horror movies. Fact: The only thing more abundant than straight-to-DVD horror movies are vampire movies. Fact: The only thing more abundant than vampire movies are molecules. So, here we are with *30 Days of Night: Dark Days*, a straight-to-DVD vampire movie sequel, just taunting us to care about it.



Yikes, that crap-ass cover certainly ain't doing the job (how did the designer make that photo look like a pencil crayon drawing anyhow???) Nope, we're here because this is the sequel to *30 Days of Night*, the theatrical blood-sucker flick by David Slade (*Hard Candy* and, sadly, the last

Twilight movie), based on the mega-popular graphic novel of the same name by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith.

Dark Days roughly follows Niles' sequel, in which Eben Oleson's widow, Stella (this time played by Kiele Sanchez instead of Melissa George) — who watched her turned husband burn up at sunrise at the end of the last film — goes to LA to hunt the vampires that destroyed her Alaskan town. She meets up with others harbouring similar vendettas, including a vamp with a hate-on for his own kind. In this version of the tale, however, the emphasis is placed on a Queen vampire (Mia Kirschner: *The Vampire Diaries*, TV's 24) who's chartering a boat full of blood-suckers to take out another northern town.

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There's plenty to work with in the source material, but key to turning *Dark Days* into a feature is really developing Niles' characters further, which writer/director Ben Ketai fails to do. Outside of Stella, we could give a coffin-shaped shirt about her love interest (Rhys Coiro), the other vampire hunters or the posturing, mugging vamps themselves. Without back stories or believable dramatic choices, the whole thing plays out like a video game, where stock characters go to different locations to complete missions. Quick! Use your new weapons to fight your way out of the abandoned factory so you can head to the wharf to face the Big Bad.

Aw crap! This is supposed to be a movie. Game over!
DAVE ALEXANDER

BETTER OFF DEAD

AFTER.LIFE

Starring Christina Ricci, Justin Long and Liam Neeson
Directed by Agnieszka Wojtowicz-Vosloo
Written by Agnieszka Wojtowicz-Vosloo, Paul Vesiole
and Jakub Kowalcuk
Anchor Bay

One of the first lessons of Storytelling 101 should be Know the Tale You Want to Tell, but it seems the folks behind *AfterLife* were sick that day or maybe playing hocky. The result of this unadvised truancy is a film that's either about a morician who reluctantly guides the dead through the confusion brought about by their sudden loss of life, or about a morician who can see "dead people walking" and must deliver them to the grave serial killer-style. Confused yet?

Here's what I can tell you... After much really 'ficken' obvious cinematic foreshadowing (i.e. blood red hair dye circling down a drain), Anna Taylor (Christina Ricci) allegedly dies in an automobile accident. This is all brought into question, however,

when she awakes on Eliot Descon's moribund slab. Eliot (played by Liam Neeson in truly unsettling fashion) explains to Anna that she's dead and has three days until her funeral to come to terms with her situation and do what she must. But is she really dead? Or is Descon a psychopath bent on burying her alive? The rest of the story is thick with red hennings, but few—if any—truly definitive answers. There's another person who can see her, a young boy, which seems to add credence to the serial killer theory (as does the fact that Eliot drugs her before her funeral), but if that's the case, then why doesn't she have any physical needs (food, bathroom, etc.) during her three-day confinement? And what about that out-of-nowhere séance scene with the mouthful of maggots? Surely, that suggests otherwise.

This movie is a headfuck, and an annoying, poorly scripted one at that. Not even quality thespians such as Ricci (who spends the majority of the movie butt naked), and Neeson can make the unconvincing dialogue sound natural. *AfterLife* could have benefited from its ever-twisting premise, but the writers' inability to make solid narrative decisions or adequately plug any of the gaping plot holes results in a nonsensical, forgettable mess.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE STARES AT SWIMWEAR

DEBBIE DOES BLOODBATH

BIKINI BLOODBATH CAR WASH

Brightly Entertainment



Back in *RMF78* I had the pleasure of reviewing a silly little slasher called *Bikini Bloodbath*, a film about a bunch of girls slaughtered by a chef with a penchant for slicing up sexy babes in hot tubs. It wasn't a great movie by any stretch, but it did star my favourite Canadian scream queen, Debbie Rochon. Thankfully, Debbie returns in this half-baked sequel to play a perky lesbian car wash owner who is forced to battle the chef's reanimated corpse.

Yes, this is a campy splatterfest replete with fart jokes and lame-ass, frat-boy humour, but it still has some half-decent gore, Playboy model Rachael Robbins (*Terror Firmer*, *Vampire Lesbian Kickboxers*) and a scene inspired by Michael Jackson's "Beat It," which makes it worth the purchase price alone!

BODY COUNT: 13

TIME 'TIL FIRST TOPLESS GIRL: 01:23

HO HO HO

BIKINI BLOODBATH CHRISTMAS

Brightly Entertainment



It's hard to believe that a movie that didn't even deserve a sequel would somehow get expanded into a trilogy, yet here we are with the third installment in the *Bikini Bloodbath* series. Picking up shortly after the events of the previous outing, Chef Death returns to stalk the bikini-clad employees of two retail stores that are battling each other for strip mall supremacy during the Christmas holidays. Both Debbie Rochon and Rachael Robbins return

to reprise their roles in this funny, clever movie that features a pair of wrestling Santa Clauses, flaming crossbows, eggnog foot soaks, a wacky cameo from Troma tyrant Lloyd Kaufman and more blood, boobs and bongs than the first two outings combined.

BODY COUNT: 14

TIME 'TIL FIRST TOPLESS GIRL: 02:41

KILLER UP!

BIKINI GIRLS ON ICE

BGO! Films



Though the title might conjure up images of bathing suit-clad babes poorly performing pirouettes, you'll definitely want to give this Canadian entry a chance, as it ratchets up the tension right from the start. After a young woman drives into an abandoned gas station and gets hacked up by a manual mechanic, the movie shifts gears to follow a gaggle of giggling girls who open a bikini car wash at the station. The killer then knocks 'em off one by one in some surprisingly ferocious kill scenes. Low on nudity but high on suspense, don't let the title fool you into thinking it's just T&A. *Bikini Girls on Ice* has a lot more production value than you'd expect from a direct-to-DVD release.

BODY COUNT: 11

TIME 'TIL FIRST TOPLESS GIRL: 29:19

LAST CHANCE LANCE



RUE MORGUE PUTS FANGORIA'S FRIGHTFEST IMPRINT TO THE TEST.



SURVIVAL OF THE SCARIEST

REVIEWS BY DAVE ALEXANDER, STUART F. ANDREWS, JOHN W. BOWEN AND LISA CHANCE LANCE



FRIGHTFEST DARK HOUSE

DARRIN SCOTT

Believe it or not, this is the film that best out this collection's seven other entries in an online Fangoria contest to appear as a nationwide theatrical release, which hit three, count 'em, three cities back in July.

Dark House centres on a group of college drama students enticed to work in an abandoned foster home that has been turned into a "haunted" attraction—complete with torture chambers and interactive holograms. Little do they know that it's actually haunted by the malevolent ghost of a woman who went nuts there fourteen years earlier and slaughtered every last kid in the place. Unfortunately, the cool premise quickly becomes a predictable, point-by-numbers haunted house flick, rife with crappy CGI and lousy acting.

The only thing that makes it even slightly watchable is Jeffrey Combs' masterful performance as Walden Rey, the opportunistic showman who owns the attraction. Combs successfully channels Vincent Price in the original *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), as he competently steals every one of his scenes in this godawful mess of a film. **C-**



FRIGHTFEST FRAGILE

JAUME BALAGUERÓ

There are two reasons why this movie (shot back in 2005) hasn't seen the light of day until now. The first is because it was directed by Jaume Balagueró, who was practically unknown to North American audiences until *[REC]* made him an overnight genre phenomenon. The second reason is because it sucks... mostly.

Set in a crumbling British children's hospital, *Fragile* stars Calista Flockhart as Amy, a nurse who discovers that the toddlers under her care are being haunted and

hurt by an unknown evil entity. Though the film is thick with eerie atmosphere and impressive CGI effects, it's apparent that Balagueró was still honing his directorial skills. There's far too much boring exposition and not enough tension or horror; that is, until a drag queen-looking mechanical apertion fit for a Marilyn Manson video appears during the climax.

The scariest thing about the whole movie is Balagueró's decision to cast veteran TV actor Calista Flockhart in the title role. Her uneven, mostly subdued performance is peppered with scenes in which she's screaming relentlessly. I guess they don't play re-runs of *Ally McBeal* in Spain. **C-**



FRIGHTFEST GRIND LOVE

MARTIN WEISZ

It's doubtful that any real-life murder case, aside from the antics of Eddie Gein, has ever spawned as many films as that of bizarre German cannibal Armin Meiwes. *Wholy Meiwes'* 2001 crime, a single murder complete with cannibalism, was considerably less spectacular than the zany antics of Jeffrey Dahmer.

Andrei Chikadeo or Albert Fish, the incident created an unparalleled media sensation because Meiwes' victim, Bernd Jürgen Brandes, had been a willing participant, having fantasized for years about being killed and eaten.

Grind Love, initially released in Europe a few years ago, is a superbly acted, character-driven version of the events. Though the actual murder is graphic, be forewarned that the ramp-up—mainly flashbacks detailing the various childhood and adolescent traumas that would eventually bring these two twisted individuals together—is very slow. Killer and victim don't even make email contact until the 55-minute mark and the, er, festivities don't get underway until roughly 70 minutes into the film's 87-minute runtime. A narrative framing device in which Ken Russell (TV's *Felicity*) plays a graduate student writing her thesis on the case is unnecessary, but her performance is impressive enough to legitimize what could have been a tiresome gimmick. A tough watch, but many cuts above its competition. **B-**



FRIGHTFEST THE HAUNTING

ELIO QUIROGA

In 2006, Spanish director Elio Quiroga made the exceptionally creepy apocalypse film *The Dark Hours*, still, sadly, unreleased in North America. Instead, we get his follow-up, *The Haunting* (originally called *No-Off*), a cheap-looking, derivative haunted house flick undeserving of its appropriated title.

The movie's original spin on the subgenre has the Catholic Church covering up a horrible crime and an evil entity—both revealed via secret, decades-old footage shot by government production company Mo-Do on special stock that's able to capture the imprints of spirits. Unfortunately, this mystery element is smothered by haunted house clichés: a family moves into an old house, the husband doesn't believe his mercurially fragile wife is really seeing ghosts, she's eventually helped by a renegade priest, strange things are heard on a baby monitor, a secret room is uncovered, religious conspiracy, obvious *Sleuth*-style shenanigans, yadda, yadda...

This might be forgivable if the scares were effective and the film didn't look like a made-for-TV flick full of awful CGI spookies and explosions. Instead of nailing potentially cool creep-outs, such as hanging dolls and mummified parts that morph into a spider-thing, Quiroga (also the writer) should have looked to the original *The Haunting* for good-free inspiration. **D+**



FRIGHTFEST HUNGER

STEVEN HEINTGES

When five chaves wake up in a deep, dark pit underground with no idea how they got there, they must put their hot potato brains together

to try to figure it out. Turns out, they've been kidnapped by an eccentric evil scientist (Blom Johanson) who's thrown them together to undergo a macabre test of character. Sound familiar? However, instead of a series of useless, bloody trials designed to teach them each a meaningless, convoluted moral lesson, the scientist plans to keep them in the pit until they're hungry enough to eat each other. He simply wants to observe who will get eaten first. Now, while the premise is shockingly similar to another well-known horror film, it wouldn't be right to call this a "poor man's Saw" because first of all, isn't Saw a "poor man's Saw"? No, this is more like a "man wearing gold chains and a cheap Italian suit Saw." And say what you will about the ludicrousness of that franchise, at least Tobin Bell delivers the goods with a perverse and sinister portrayal of Jigsaw. The evil scientist in this is about as menacing as a member of children's musical trio Shere, Lois and Bram. This movie is shilly shally right down to the cutlery! SFA

FrightFest

WILLIE SOUSA
PIG HUNT



hilarious revenge tale, a sex cult pic and an action flick that channels *The Road Warrior*.

It features city boys (and a girlfriend) on a backwoods hunting trip, who uneasily partner up with locals in pursuit of "The Ripper," a mythical, gigantic wild boar. When they stumble upon a marijuana field and one of the group is killed, the hunters become the hunted. Pursued by hillbillies and something monstrous in the forest, they eventually encounter a sex cult led by a knife-wielding guru (!!).

Director James Isaac (*Jason X*, *Skinnerhead*) struggles to contain this genre explosion, and the tone swings from darkly comedic to dead serious to surreal. But, with plenty of unexpected character and story twists, and a delightfully strange soundtrack courtesy of Prince bass-basher Les Claypool, this sugar-shocked Frankenstein of a film will leave you grinning. DA

FrightFest

DEAN FRANCIS
ROAD KILL



work, as well as surprisingly strong acting—it's all here, so couldn't someone have contributed a script that made a lick of sense? I don't need every narrative twist fully justified but I haven't seen this much completely unmotivated action since... well, probably something involving Eli Roth. People sneek up on each other unnecessarily, one guy drinks his urine after a few hours in the desert and a couple in the midst of a life-threatening situation fight over an old infidelity. Dude, ARGH!

Director Dean Francis keeps it gritty and action-packed while avoiding the tired modern horror film groaners—no obvious CGI, no music video wankery—but *Road Kill*'s script keeps putting him in submission holds. Only cinematographer Carl Robertson comes out unscathed, displaying a fantastic gift for photography and tremendous versatility when adjusting to the film's shifting moods. Now, regarding that über-cliche title... oops, out of space. JWB

FrightFest

JAMES ISAAC
PIG HUNT

Remember when, as a kid, you mixed together a bunch of sugary cereals, trying to create the ultimate food, but instead just got a bowl of grey milk and a gut ache? Well, mix too many cinematic sub-genres and you're courting disaster, too. Despite the shifty R-rated-hoped cover, *Pig Hunt* is only part gant, Miller animal movie. It's also a survival horror film, a



The Wicked And The Wounded (clockwise from top) Jeffrey Combs as Winston Rey in *Dark Mouse*, ghostly children in *The Hungar*, victims in *The Hungar*, man on the move in *Grimm Love*, and (opposite) an offering for the beast in *Pig Hunt*.

FrightFest



FrightFest

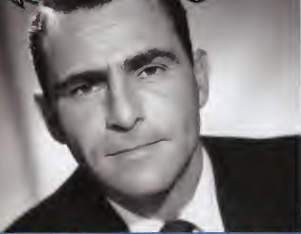
MICHAEL STANNINGER

This loose riff on the short story "Ugola" by Edgar Allan Poe stars wide-eyed weirdo Wes Bentley (*American Beauty*) as an utterly unconvincing professor named Jonathan who leaves his beautiful fiancée Rowena (Kaitlin Doubleday) for a mysterious Russian student named Ugola (Sofya Skya). Together, they flee to her mansion near the Black Sea where he soon learns her terrible secret. Apparently, she's been extracting the souls of her dead victims in order to perpetuate her immortality. This proves to be too much of a bummer for Jonathan so he splits, prompting Ugola to throw herself to her demise. In an act of extreme trickiness, Jonathan

marries Rowena then moves back into Ugola's mansion, where the spirit of his jilted lover proceeds to nightmarishly terrorize the living daylight out of them.

Cameos by Eric Roberts (with a Russian accent) and Michael Madsen (as a hopeless drunk) punctuate the fun and games, but in truth their presence is not nearly as diverting as it should be. *The Tomb* is a first-class clusterfuck of dodgy acting, terrible dialogue, cheesy music and wonky editing, but it's not without its appeal. Beautiful cinematography and Gothic atmosphere abound, but it's the sally charms of Sofya Skya that turn this potential junkie into potent eye candy. SFA

RETRACES



SERLING AT HIS SHARPEST

THE TWILIGHT ZONE: SEASON 1 (1959) Blu-ray

Starring Burgess Meredith, Jack Klugman, et al.
Directed by John Brahm, Alvin Ganzer, et al.
Written by Rod Serling, Richard Matheson, et al.
Image

It turns out that Image Entertainment's "Definitive Edition" of *The Twilight Zone: Season 1* wasn't definitive after all.

Released on DVD back in 2004, the premiere 1959-

1960 season of Rod Serling's seminal TV show was a 72-ten's wet dream: six discs containing all 36 episodes, as well as goodies such as multiple audio commentaries, the original version of the pilot ("Where Is Everybody?") and vintage audio interviews with series stars including Burgess Meredith and Martin Landau. And the best extra of all: a copy of author Marc Scott Zicree's *The Twilight Zone Companion* (second edition), a deeply researched, comprehensive book that detailed the show's history, summarized every episode of all five seasons and included interviews with actors, producers, writers and the like.

Now with a new format (Blu-ray) comes a new edition boasting improved dimensions of sight and

sound, but what about mind? These digitally scrubbed episodes look and sound better than ever, but *The Twilight Zone* was less about effects than ideas. So has Image done anything to make fans want to trade in their admittedly bulky DVD version for the slimmer, sexier Blu-ray?

Mostly yes. The company has produced nineteen new audio commentaries, many of them featuring Zicree but also including the likes of screenwriters Gary Gerani (*Pumpkinhead*) and Mark Fergus (*Children of Men*, *Iron Man*) and added many more radio adaptations. Zicree's commentaries are especially informative, explaining the origins of each episode and its significance within the series. Missing this time, though, is a copy of his book. Boo.

Perhaps the jewel in this set's crown is the inclusion of "The Time Element," Serling's first TZ-style TV drama. Produced as part of the Westinghouse Desilu Playhouse (a dramatic anthology series produced by Lucille Ball and her husband Desi Arnaz), the rarely seen segment—broadcast in November of 1958—was an hour-long time-travel drama written by Serling. Its ratings success paved the way for CBS green-lighting *The Twilight Zone*. As a prototype TZ episode it is only moderately successful but serves as a fascinating harbinger of Serling's future exploration of what lies between the pet of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge.

SEAN PLUMMER

NICE GAMS

GAMERA VS. GYASO (1967) DVD

Starring Kojin Minge, Kichijiro Oeda and Reiko Kasehara
Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisao Takahashi
Shout! Factory

GAMERA VS. VIRAS (1968)

Starring Kojin Minge, Toru Takatsuka and Carl Craig
Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisao Takahashi
Shout! Factory

When we last left everybody's favorite giant radioactive turtle, he proudly poked his head out of his shell for the accomplished city-leveling sequel, *Gamera vs. Baragon*. Shout! Factory's ongoing reissue series catches up with the kaiju champion for his next adventures with *Gamera vs. Gyaso* and *Gamera vs. Viras*, two early indications that Daien's franchise was about to slide into campy kid's fare.

First up is *Gamera vs. Gyaso*, a fast-paced, undeniably entertaining monster movie that gives *Gamera* one of his most interesting adversaries. Born of an erupting volcano and driven by an insatiable lust for human and animal blood, the airborne Gyaso only looks like a poor man's Rodan—he's actually quite deadly, slicing airplanes and cars clean in half with a deadly sonic beam he shoots out of his mouth.

Daien's miniatures team pulled out all the stops for the series' third entry, with some impressive sets that look just as good as those in any Godzilla film. Against these highly detailed cityscapes and forests, director Noriaki Yuasa pits his monster gladiators in the series' most violent battles, spilling lots of Day-Glo blood as the pair slash and tear at each other, including one memorable scene where *Gamera* rips off part of Gyaso's foot.

Hate those annoying kids in short pants always trying to side up to the monsters in these films? Then you can double your displeasure with *Gamera vs. Viras*, in which precocious American Boy Scout Jim (Carl Craig) and even more precocious Japanese Boy Scout Masao (Toru Takatsuka) stumble upon an alien plot to use a mind-control device to turn *Gamera* into their Tokyo-demolishing slave.

Unfortunately, the smash-'em-up scenes are just stock footage cribbed from the turtle's earlier installments. There's little new FX work until the aliens unleash Viras, an ill-tempered space squid that the lberated *Gamera* takes on in his most cartoonish battle yet, even using his foe as personal water skis in the madcap finale.

Shout! Factory's pairing of the series' lesser entries makes it easier to shell out for this release, but it also means that there's nothing in the way of special features this time out—though they do both offer Japanese and English dub soundtracks. Still, these entries are mostly enjoyable romps that will please kaiju fans with an appreciation for monster blood and a tolerance for short pants.

PAUL CORIUE



FAY 'RAY

KING KONG (1933) Blu-ray

Starring Fay Wray, Robert Armstrong and Bruce Cabot
Directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack
Written by James Creston, Ruth Rose,
Merian C. Cooper, et al.
Warner Bros.

King Kong isn't just a classic monster movie. It's one of the few titles that irrevocably changed the medium. The special effects-driven blockbusters that dominate Hollywood today can all be traced back to that famous stop-motion gorilla puppet climbing the Empire State Building. It's hard to think of another movie monster that's more iconic or a scream queen as lovably shrill as Fay Wray, so it's no surprise King Kong's inevitable appearance on Blu-ray serves as a reminder of how ridiculously entertaining the film is and just how few times it's been equalled.

Easily the best presentation that King Kong has ever received on home video, Warner Bros' Blu-ray finds the movie has aged remarkably well (beyond its laughably naive portrayal of natives and women, of course). Due to the age of the negative, it's not a slick digital transfer like the Blu-ray for Peter Jackson's 2005 *Kiwi* remake, so you can expect a layer



of grain on the image, which vividly renders the texture of the original film stock. Still, every piece of rabbit hair jostled by special effects guru Willis O'Brien to simulate the beast's fur is crystal clear. Unfortunately, no new special features were included beyond those from the 2005

two-disc DVD, but that's probably because there wasn't much room for improvement. The Jackson-produced seven-part documentary covers every aspect of the groundbreaking production, featuring interviews with Kong experts, the late Wray and famous fans such as John Landis, Rick Baker, Ray Harryhausen and Frank Darabont. Though the archival test footage of O'Brien's abandoned dinosaur epic *Creation* and Jackson's re-enactment of the lost spider pit sequence get an impressive high-def upgrade, the supplemental material is otherwise identical to what came before.

If you don't yet own a copy of King Kong, this is the one. Whether or not you want to upgrade from the previous DVD will depend on how much you value improved presentation, but seeing that famous gorilla come alive so vividly while Wray squeals in

Mad Ron's Prevues From Hell:
A splash of Dono Argento's Deep Red

beautifully restored sound is simply horror movie gold.

PHIL BROWN

SINS OF OUR FATHERS

MAD RON'S PREVUES FROM HELL (1987) DVD

Starring Nick Pawlow and Happy Goldspelt
Directed by Jim Munoz
Written by James F. Murray Jr., Ron Roccia,
Nick Pawlow, et al.
Off the Wall Video

Before IMDb and YouTube, the trailer compilation tape was a valuable tool for exploitation exploration. Labels such as Smiler Cinema and Wizard Video teased fans with numerous releases, offering a glimpse of undiscovered shocktits. Now, a highly sought-after compilation from that era, *Mad Ron's Prevues From Hell*, has finally hit DVD.

Originally released in 1987, this collection of 47 of the strangest, goriest and sleaziest horror and exploitation film trailers from the '60s and '70s is hosted by a bookwormish ventriloquist named Nick Pawlow and his sarcastic, potty-mouthed zombie dummy, Happy Goldspelt. Adding a unique element are wraparound segments set in an old movie theatre populated by a zombie audience that



not only munch on buckets of bloodsoaked popcorn but also each other while waiting for the cinema's insane, mouth-frothing projectionist, Mad Ron (Ron Roccia), to play the trailers.

The scope of the selection is wide, with sublime entries such as *Night of the Living Dead*, *Tales from the Crypt*, *Black Christmas* (a.k.a. *Silent Night, Evil Night*) and *Deep Red* included alongside sleaze masterpieces such as *Color Me Blood Red*, *The Undertaker and His Pals*, *The Corpse Grinders*, *It's a She Wolf of the S.S.* and the truly offensive promo for 1966's *Africa: Blood and Guts*—which features numerous images of human executions and animal killings. Ads for films that are thematically linked are grouped together, such as the Ed Gein-inspired *Three on a Mitehook*, *De-ranged* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

The downside is the poor picture and sound quality. Released in fullscreen format, it looks as though it's been sourced from an old VHS cassette and wear 'n' tear is evident. Some will see this as adding an element of grindhouse charm. Extras include a movie poster gallery, behind-the-scenes making-of footage and trailers for the compilation itself. It'll leave you pining for the sordid classics of yesteryear.

JAMES BURRELL

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AS SEEN ON **VD**



Nobuhiko Obayashi
takes us on a tour of his
cult classic **HOUSE**,
the world's weirdest
poltergeist picture.

by Bryan Hartzheim

IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE JAPANESE CULT SENSATION *HOUSE*, chances are you've heard about it from someone who has. *House* (aka *House*) was originally released in Japan in 1977 by Toho Studios to modest success, but has rarely been seen by international audiences – until the last couple of years, when Japan Film began screening a reissued print of the film throughout America. Fans have clamored for more, and the Criterion Collection has finally obliged, with a just-released DVD and Blu-ray special edition.

House seems to have been made with every Japanese anime and tokusatsu cliché in mind. A brightly coloured, highly theatrical set? Check. A cast of bubbly young females? Check. Infectious pop tunes? Check. Gory dismemberment, random nude scenes, and killer ghost cats? Check, check, and check. It's ostensibly about a group of city girls visiting the palatial mansion of an elderly aunt who are devoured one by one in increasingly creative ways by the possessed house. But to describe *House* in a brief synopsis doesn't do justice to its creative insanity. Its mix of fantasy, horror, sci-

ence fiction, romance, and seishun eiga (youth flick) is partly a parody of those genres but also at times genuinely disturbing.

It is the brilliant brainchild of Nobuhiko Obayashi, a director with a diverse array of supernatural tales to his credit and a knack for doing things his own way, despite making films for the mainstream. Even today, he maintains a fierce independence: his studio is an office in Tokyo with a staff comprised of his wife, daughter and son-in-law.

After a career in ad and avant-garde work, Obayashi was commissioned by Toho Studios – an unheard-of move for the insular company – to helm a picture that would help resuscitate the moribund Japanese film industry. *House* didn't quite accomplish that impossible task, but it did kick-start Obayashi's career in eclectic feature films that mix genres, cultural commentary and an original aesthetic that reflects the director's training in both commercial and experimental media. To commemorate the restored release of *House*, *Rue Morgue* called Japan to get the specs on this demented piece of real estate from the 72-year-old director.

How did you get started in the film business?

When I was making 8mm and 16mm films independently, I was also writing stories. I earned university in Tokyo and began screening these stories on white canvases in galleries. I was recognized as a "film artist," and started making commercials to fund my own projects. At the time, commercials were unique in that they could be one- to three-minute shorts that offered filmmakers a lot of freedom, paid a lot more than filmmaking and generally allowed us to have fun making the kind of films we wanted to make. I had a blast making commercials with people like David Niven, Kirk Douglas, Charles Bronson, Sofia Loren, Catherine Deneuve and Ringo Starr. After a while, I was finally able to make my debut feature.

You supposedly got the idea for *House* from your daughter. Is this true?

Yes, that's true. The story is based on an idea from my [then] eleven-year-old daughter, Chigemi. The producer at Toho Studios who I worked with on my commercials asked me for an idea for a movie, so I thought of my daughter's idea — this was sort of a joke, since only Toho-contracted directors made Toho films at the time. My daughter came up with it one day when she had just taken a bath. While she was combing her hair in front of the mirror, she said, "Wouldn't it be funny if my reflection came out to eat me?" From that one comment, I made a story about seven girls who were eaten by a house. ... Einn [the Japanese Motion Picture Code of Ethics Committee] praised the film by saying it was like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. They didn't seem to be fazed by the grotesque horror scenes.

How did such an unusual film finally go into production?

Toho was very happy with the idea, but it wasn't green-lit because there was no director of Toho who could helm the picture. ("This script is incomprehensible," they said.) Over the next two years, I approached people I had met through the commercial industry with ways to adapt *House* — as a novel, a shonen or shojo manga (boys or girls comic), even as some department store merchandise and a soundtrack record. (Incidentally, many of the people who were cheering for the project had seen my indie flick, *Emotion: Afternoon Legend — The Dracula / Gipsyhead* which is on the Criterion disc's extras.) I was planning on making it a multimedia thing, but then a radio dramatization of *House* I did became a huge hit. Toho finally green-lit the film upon hearing of the success of the radio drama, and they made a special exception to hire me outside of the studio when the union agreed to my employment. I became the director and producer of the film, and shooting finished in about two months.

What type of film did you not out to make?

The movies — and art — of the time were aiming for realism, so I aimed to make a dream-like movie. Even here, I was thinking of a throwback to something more classical, so I made it a Gothic romance. The Toho people couldn't understand the film at all but they told me to make it so that

there was no way they could understand it. I think that was a smart decision. ... [They] asked me not to make a Japanese movie, but a movie that was a commercial for the movies. *House* is, in this way, my love letter to the cinema.

What was the target audience? It initially seems like a kids' film, but then becomes way too violent and sexual.

Movies can make children extend themselves beyond their capabilities, but also can make adults feel like children again. I believe movies make you think about humanity and the world in these various ways, so I never think of a target audience when I make my films. Target audiences are also a commercial imperative, so I'm not interested in them at all.

There are many genres that mix in *House* — how did you classify the film when you first made it?

I wanted to put everything that I loved about movies into *House*, so for me, the genre of the film is "A Movie." Rather than thinking of it as a fantasy or horror movie, I wanted to make a movie that wasn't "Japanese." In other words, I created the "Nobuhiko Obayashi" genre. "Obayashi movies: You'll either love 'em or ignore 'em!" That's how my films are thought of even today.

Was *House* inspired by any horror or fantasy films? Or any manga?

I've always loved *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses* is also a film that I especially love, and *Emotion* is an homage to Vadim's work. I also like old Japanese *tokusatsu* (ghost cat) movies.

I take it you really like cats, given their role in *House*?

Yes, I do. [Laughs] When I was a kid, our cat gave birth to sextuplets on top of my stomach. I was sleeping at the time, and I rolled over on my side and squashed one. Even a cat's life is a story.

What sorts of films are you interested in making today?

I've experienced war, and from a young age I had the mindset, like many others, of being prepared to die at any time. I was probably able to purely internalize this mindset even better since I was a child. Because of my experiences, I'd like to continue thinking about the meanings of war and peace.

What project are you working on now?

I'm writing a story about the relationship between a woman who has been traumatized by war and can no longer stomach even the sight of fireworks, and a pyrotechnist who wants to collect all the explosives in the world for a huge fireworks show, with the idea that if he does, war will disappear. I think the strangest way to build towards a future of peace is to communicate the pain of war to younger generations who have never experienced it. But I'm a filmmaker, so this desire ends up being expressed in movies like *House*. ☺



Blood and Roses (top to bottom: the film's surreal use of gore; the infamous cat spews grue; live-action and animation mix; and Gorgeous (Kiriko Kikuyama) bleeds)

THE CAST AND COMPOSER OF CRAZED BRITISH
CULT FILM **PSYCHOMANIA**
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HELL-BENT FOR LEATHER

STANLEY KUBRICK'S 1971 NIHILISTIC MASTERPIECE *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* WAS WITHDRAWN FROM THEATRES IN THE UK WHEN A COUPLE OF ALLEGED COPYCAT CRIMES WERE COMMITTED FOLLOWING THE FILM'S RELEASE, including a gang rape where the attackers supposedly mimicked the movie and sang a rendition of "Singin' in the Rain" to their victim. If the intent was to ride this wave of controversy, the timing could not have been more perfect for a little-known 1973 British exploration film about a gang of fun-lovin', homicidal teenage bikers with seemingly one purpose: to terrorize the locals with a meaningless campaign of gas-guzzling, ultra-violent, undead(!) hijinks.

BY
STUART F. ANDREWS



Motor Psychos: (from left to right) *Hitcher* (Dennis Glover), *Chopped Meat* (Miles Gressenwood), *Jane Fonda* (Ann McElvey), *Shadow* (George Sanders) and *Abby Holman* (Mary Larkin) look at a sinister angle, and (right) the gang's trademark half-skull helmet

Directed by veteran British horror director Don Sharp (*The Kiss of the Vampire*) and written by Julian Zimet and Arnaud d'Usseau (*Horror Express*), *Psychomana* (released in the US as *The Death Wheelers*) shares more than a few story elements with its more famous kinsman. In one of the film's opening scenes, a gang of bikers, known affectionately as "The Living Dead," force a motorist off the road, echoing the "hugs of the road" Durango 95 sequence in Kubrick's classic. The film even sports a charming, young scoundrel in the form of gang leader Tom Latham (Nicky Henson, *Witchfinder General*), who recalls *Clockwork*'s protagonist, Alex DeLarge. But the similarities end there as *Psychomana* proceeds to manifest one of the most berserk plots of any British horror movie of the 1970s.

"At that time, I thought if you do dodgy films, nobody pays to see dodgy films. Of course, you're not realizing that years later they come out on DVD and become 'cults,'" says Henson with a laugh, still very much in possession of the cheeky charm of the character he played nearly 40 years ago.

"Also, I was a mad motorcyclist," he adds. "I never had a car. So the script comes through the door and I open it up and it says, 'Eight Chopped Hog Harley Davidsons crest the brow of a hill.' I rang my agent and said, 'I'll do it.' I didn't read any further than the 'Eight Chopped Hog Harley Davidsons.' Anyway, I arrived on set the first day and there's eight dapped-out 350 AJ's and Matchless BSAs. I say, 'Where's the Harley Davidsons?' They said, 'You gotta be kidding?' It's the only show I've ever been on where there were eight mechanics working the whole time to keep the bikes running because they get 'em in some second-hand shop somewhere and they were falling to bits."

Had he read the script further before signing on, Henson would've learned that his character was a rich, bored young man living in an opulent mansion with his clairvoyant mother, who would eventually be played by veteran British actress Beryl Reid (*Dr. Phibes Rises Again*, *The Doctor and the Devil*) and a mysterious butler named Shadowell who never seems to age, a role ultimately taken on by legendary British actor George Sanders (*Village of the Damned*, *Rebecca*). When Tom demands to know the identity of his deceased father, his mother allows him entry into one of the mansion's perpetually locked rooms. Here he encounters a magical mirror that reveals to him a terrible secret: he is the son of Satan himself!

While recovering from the shock, Tom overhears his mother accidentally reveal to Shadowell the secret of everlasting life: kill yourself with the firm belief that you will return from the dead as an indestructible, un-

dead fiend. Wasting little time, Tom imitates one of the gang's mad motorbike rampages—which mostly consists of driving around the town square knocking things over—and when the "luzs" come to bust up the fun, he careens off the side of a bridge hurtling himself into the waters below and to an untimely demise. After one of the most bizarre funerals in the history of cinema, during which he's buried sitting upright on his motorbike in an open grave whilst a hippie plays a ballad for him on an acoustic guitar, Tom returns from the dead as an immortal zombie biker, thus prompting the rest of the gang to follow suit and take their own lives in increasingly strange and hilarious ways. It's a mental mix of black magic, black leather, black humour and load worship!

"Load worship really is not your everyday thing," jokes actress Mary Larkin (*The Razor's Edge*, who plays Abby Holman, Tom's love interest in the film). "And of course the actually spooky bit to me is that people think if they die they'll come back. That's the bit in the film that would scare me, that people would ever think anything like that."

Beyond its incomprehensible plot, one of the film's most famous attributes is the copious number of mad motorcycle stunts that see riders career through bridges, brick walls and baby carriages.

"It's such an appalling concept, isn't it?" says Larkin. "You nearly can't take it seriously. I remember that scene and I think that my character actually did have some qualms about it. I'm glad to say."

Henson recalls, "I had a stunt double whose name I won't say, 'cause he might still be alive, but he did three stunts for me in the movie and ended up in the hospital after each one. When I drove off the bridge to commit suicide, he managed to hit the water before the bike and the bike landed on top of him. But the weirdest one is when I drive through the wall. It was a polystyrene wall and they painted it to look like bricks but we didn't shoot it for two or three weeks. And of course the paint kept on fading so they kept painting it over. When he came to do the stunt, the bike went through the wall and he didn't. He was stuck on the

other side. It was like a cartoon."

Also notable is the film's hypnotic, experimental score courtesy of veteran British composer John Cameron (*The Ruling Class*, *Night Walkers*), which from the opening shots at the bikers driving through a fog-drenched stone bridge delivers some hilariously memorable progressive rock hooks accompanied by an array of unusual organic sounds.

"I knew we needed a score that was spooky and different but had kind of a rock feeling to it and it was kind of pre-synthesizer," explains the composer. "I mean, you could get Mr. Moog and his synthesizer but you needed a room about the size of Abbey Road Ham-

mer 1 to get the bloody thing in. So you had to be a bit ingenious. By that time, we'd been working in really quite high-tech studios. For this one, we had to use Shepherd's recording studios and it hadn't been updated since before the war. The hilarious thing is actually having these modern musicians all trying to do strange things, scratch inside pianos and turn sounds inside out, but the recording engineer still had a suit and be on. It was so anachronistic."

The film would also feature Sanders' in his final role. Legend has it that *Psychomana* inspired the actor to take his own life.

"The story goes that George Sanders saw an answer print of *Psychomana* in Madrid," ex-

plains Henson. "Then he went back to his hotel room, killed himself, and left a note saying, 'I'm so bored.' In other words saying, 'What the hell's happened to my career? What am I doing? I'm old. I might as well go now.'"

"He was great fun on the movie," Henson adds. "We laughed and laughed and laughed and spoiled an awful lot of takes. I mean, it must have been a nightmare for the director because we were all so young and behaving so badly and realized that we were all working on something that was kind of peripheral, that would just disappear. But of course it hasn't. That's the weird and wonderful thing about it. People come up to me in the street and quote lines from it now."

A new DVD Special Edition of *Psychomana* that includes a new transfer from the only uncut 35mm print in existence is out now from Severin Films.



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SHE KISSED HIS LIPS
... they were COLD!

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... there was NO PULSE!

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... there was NO BLOOD!

SHE WAS
MARRIED TO
A WALKING
DEAD MAN!

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THE SOUL OF A MONSTER

ROSE HUBART-GEORGE MACREADY-JIM SANNON
JEANNE BATES-ERIK ROLF

MUSIC BY ALFRED NEWMAN. COSTUME DESIGNER: EDWARD DEIN. EDITOR: BILL JOHNS.



WICKED FEMINE WILES

THE SOUL OF A MONSTER (1944)

Starring Rose Hobart, George Macready and Jim Sannon
Directed by Will Jason
Written by Edward Dein
Columbia

If your distress call is answered by a woman whose shoulder pads are broader than Lon Chaney's, don't answer the door.

Such a lesson is learned by Anne Winslow (Jeanne Bates) in *The Soul of a Monster*, now available through Sony's Columbia Screen Classics by Request on the company's website. While her husband George (George Macready) lies on his deathbed suffering from a mysterious ailment, Anne's call to God for salvation goes unanswered. Naturally, she turns to the Devil, who sends Lilyan Gregg (Rose Hobart), an oily, pale stranger in black.

After being revived by the stranger, George goes back to work, but all is not well in this role-reversed Faustian bargain. Despite once being a prominent and beloved surgeon – made painfully obvious by the spinning newspapers during the film's opening sequence – he is now behaving badly. He hates his dog, he's being lured around by a strange voice and doesn't seem to bleed when his colleague, fellow surgeon Roger Vance (Jim Sannon, who would have been played by Lon Chaney Jr. had this been an *Inner Sanctum* serial from Universal),

accidentally cuts him with a pair of scissors.

Unlike in the Val Lewton films at RKO, the character's psychological health is never called into question here. All parties involved realize that the vampish Lilyan – who, despite her ethereal disposition, lives in a rather middle-class apartment – is to blame for George's erratic behaviour.

Under the control of Lilyan, George soon turns on his friends. In one of the film's only suspenseful scenes, he follows Vance along a darkened street armed with an ice pick and the requisite malicious intent, while the score, by the prolific Mescha Bakaleinikoff (20 Million Miles to Earth, *The Giant Claw*) builds to a haunting, ear-pierking crescendo of strings similar to the adagio in Wojciech Kilar's score for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1992) – a definite highlight. Eventually it's up to Anne to battle Lilyan for George's soul.

In the world of classic horror, the 1940s belonged to Val Lewton, whose psychological thrillers such as *Cat People* (1942) and *Isle of the Dead* (1945) moved the genre forward, while Universal, the stalwart of the 1930s, carried its monster-driven formula into the World War II era. Squeezed between these two titans was Columbia Pictures, whose horror output, although minimal, falls narratively somewhere in the middle. In *The Return of the*

Vampire (1943), for instance, director Lew Sanders borrowed heavily from Universal's conventions by teaming Bela Lugosi, as a vampire, with a werewolf (albeit one of the saddest-looking ones you'll ever see), while *The Soul of a Monster* explores the more internalized style of horror that Lewton made famous. Not surprisingly, the studio – then best known for releasing Three Stooges shorts and Frank Capra's screwball comedies such as *It Happened One Night* (1934) – never really mastered the horror film, and *The Soul of a Monster*, with its slow pacing and heavy religious overtones, which worked to greater effect in Warner Bros' *The Walking Dead* (1936), is no exception.

But what does make this film more than a footnote in '40s horror is that its antagonist, although an emissary of the Big Guy below, is female. Women playing principal roles in horror films was not new, but they almost always played victims. For example, Gloria Holden in Universal's *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) wants to be rid of the family curse, while Simone Simon's Irena Reed in the aforementioned *Cat People*, depending on your viewpoint, is afflicted with a psychiatric disorder.

Here, Hobart's icy performance as the dominant Lilyan is one for the books. Undoubtedly inspired by Joan Crawford (Hobart's hairstyle mimics the one popularized by the actress in the early '40s, with a slight devil-horn lock thrown

in for good measure) and the femme fatales appearing in contemporaneous film noir, she is devoid of emotion and her scenes are framed in a way that makes her look down upon the other characters, enhancing her maternal, controlling nature (She was no stranger to horror; earlier, having appeared in Paramount's *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* and *The Mad Ghoul* at Universal.)

Writer Edward Dein also penned *Calling Dr. Death* for Universal's mediocre *Inner Sanctum*. If *The Soul of a Monster* had been part of that series of films, it may have stood out as one of its best, but ultimately, it's not surprising that this simply plotted 61-minute film with an interesting look at genre gender roles has been mostly forgotten.

ERIC VEILLETTE





CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS. DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL
by John W. Bowen

I could probably fill this entire column just name-dropping creepy-kid horror films, but that would be pretty lame, so let's zoom in on one near-forgotten little Canadian flick from that subgenre — a film that's especially notable for combining the scary with the just plain icky. *The Pit* (1981) is the story of a boy, his teddy bear, his burgeoning sexuality, his beautiful babysitter, a bunch of trolls who live in a hole in the ground in the woods nearby and various individuals who bully, aggravate, insult or otherwise piss off said boy and therefore have an appointment with said trolls.

Even the most open-minded individuals can become laughably uncomfortable with the notion of adolescent or — worse still — pre-adolescent sexuality, even though it's a simple fact of life. With that in mind, it's all the more remarkable that *The Pit* hasn't accumulated more than a tiny following over the years.

Pubescent sociopath and sex offender-in-waiting Jamie (Sammy Snyder) does manage to elicit our sympathy, even though it's easy to understand why he's ostracized and bullied by kids and instinctively mistrusted by adults. Even in cinema's evil child pantheon, he's an odd case: not a ghost, not demonically possessed, not even a charming little manipulator. In fact, let's not mince words — he's a sketchy little fuck. A twelve-year-old with a deep attachment to his teddy bear is creepy enough, but when kid and bear have actual conversations, it's obvious that our Jamie isn't exactly going to improve with age. Add to this his oft-alarming tendency to give free rein to his voyeuristic urges and a general lack of impulse control when it comes to violence — no, definitely not your average problem child. When Jamie's parents take a road trip, they

hire beautiful Sandy (Jeanne Elias), a student specializing in the care of "special" kids; she makes the rookie mistake of parading around in skimpy nighties and leaving doors unlocked while showering, so naturally all hormonal hell breaks loose.

The oft-painful dialogue is exacerbated by uniformly awkward performances, the two exceptions — fortunately — being leads Snyder and Elias, both of whom acquit themselves superbly. The wildly uneven script frequently undermines our suspension of disbelief, toggling between the creepy, the less-than-credible and, occasionally, both at once. (Despite all her admonishment of Jamie for inappropriate sexual behaviour, Sandy happily consents to wash his back while he's in the tub — equal parts "Eewwww!" and "Oh, come on!")

For all the script problems, though, the film cleverly keeps us suspicious that the titular pit and its inhabitants are simply some Freudian manifestation of Jamie's twisted psyche, until a series of killings forces us to rethink matters. (According to some sources, the original screenplay kept the trolls imaginary, until director Lew Lehman decided otherwise.) Unfortunately,

that revelation makes for an awkward tonal shift in the final act, during which Jamie dispatches the little girl who has repeatedly pranked him, the local mean old lady, Sandy's dumb jock boyfriend, the school bully and the bully's spoiled princess girlfriend, mainly in an extended montage with a comic relief music score. By the time the dim-witted local constabulary catch on and launch their clumsy-ass investigation it is, of course, too late.

One rather uncomfortable footnote: rumour has it Lehman's wife wouldn't let him shoot any nudity, so boob-shot directorial dubies were temporarily handed off to screenwriter Ian Stuart, with the sole exception being a scene involving Lehman's own daughter skinny-dipping, which wifey was apparently okay with. In fairness, I don't have a daughter myself, so maybe something's missing from my perspective, but I can't be the only one who finds the idea pretty fucking skeezy.

Quibbles aside, there's no denying that *The Pit* succeeds in skillfully pushing some of our yucky buttons, not by being particularly overt or graphic, but simply by having the temerity to acknowledge that young kids actually do think about sex. Why, at that age, I myself was notorious for... nah, let's go there some other time. (Or not. — Ed.) Now stop touching yourself inappropriately and get the hell out of my basement. 🍷



BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Stylistically, vampires can be herded into two camps. The most popular portrayal has arguably been the seductive romantic, as brought to life by Bela Lugosi's iconic portrayal of Oracula in the 1931 Universal film. Alternatively, there's the vampire as a physically repulsive and unrelenting force of evil. Without a doubt, the epitome of this representation is Count Orlok, the terrifying bloodsucker in 1922's *Nosferatu*, a film that still manages to send shivers up the spine.

"*Nosferatu* is the story of a vampire who slithers unriveted into the lives of others, as opposed to romancing his way in," according to comic writer Christopher Howard Wolf. "Max Schreck portrayed *Nosferatu* as The Other. He is subhuman, as opposed to superhuman. He's not charming, and he's not attractive. This is something you don't often see in vampire lore these days, which usually presents them as misunderstood souls, high-flying killing machines, or members of hierarchical secret societies."

Wolf is no stranger to the Orlok story, having recently penned Viper Comics' new *Nosferatu* graphic novel, a "re-imagining" of the classic film. "The graphic novel was basically conceived during a conversation between myself and Jessie Garza, president of Viper Comics," explains Wolf. "We were discussing horror comics, and I immediately considered pitching a retelling of the *Nosferatu* story. As much as I love the film, I didn't have any interest in trying to create an exact copy of it. Trying to do that seems more outrageous than putting my own spin on it."

The basic narrative remains the same. The protagonist, Tommy Hutter, is sent to visit the mysterious Graf Orlok at his dilapidated castle somewhere in Eastern Europe. Once there, Orlok learns of Hutter's true love, the beautiful Elle, and travels to their homeland in order to possess her, body and soul, taking plague and pestilence with him. Hutter, who barely escaped from Orlok's castle

alive after discovering his terrible secret, teams up with vampire expert Agent Bullner in the hopes of reaching Elle before it's too late.

Aside from setting the tale in contemporary times, Wolf's most drastic update is making the story's protagonist female. Yes, Tommy Hutter is a spunky photographer who happens to be in a loving same-sex relationship with Elle.

"This sort of story usually centres on an unhealthy male force that wants to corrupt, or destroy, the female," explains Wolf. "In this version, Elle is not simply threatened by the intent, but the gender as well. I feel like this partly addresses certain issues with obsessive and destructive behaviour toward those with alternate lifestyles." (To Wolf's credit, the story's lesbian relationship is presented as genuine and caring, never exploitative — despite what the cover suggests.)

Another key change is that the plague that Orlok unleashes on the city's population is believed to be a terrorist attack, hence the Van Helsing character has been recast as an agent from Homeland Security. Wolf strongly believes that horror in general, and this story in particular, lends itself to social criticism.

"The original *Nosferatu* film played upon fear of the plague. If you think about it, we're still in that place today, we just have more plagues to choose from. If people start dropping like flies in modern-day streets, we'll point the finger at new 'monsters.' The 1922 film itself contained social commentary. Some even theorize that Orlok represented a variety of phobias, like the fear of Jews and homosexuals. I don't subscribe to these beliefs, but it's interesting to see *Nosferatu*'s commentary real or imagined, inspiring debate after all this time."

Despite the many updates that Wolf made to the original story, one highly crucial component remained constant: Orlok himself. Artist Justin Wayne's uncanny depiction of the Count is faithful to Schreck's incarnation: bulbous bald head, beak-



Nosferatu: The classic vampire re-imagined for a modern audience

like nose, a hunchbacked yet elongated body, spindly, crooked fingers that taper into claws and, of course, the omnipresent razor-sharp fangs. Wayne has also managed to faithfully reproduce the actor's portrayal of the vampire, using many of the film's shots as cues for the book's panels. Ultimately, the reader is left with a retelling of a classic story that retains the original's essence, especially when it comes to the horrific and the grotesque.

Wolf is a bit coy when it comes to future "re-imagining" ("Justin mentioned possibly doing something with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*,") but admits that his dealings with *Nosferatu* may not be over, especially if the response to the project is positive. "We do have a nice little Count Orlok origin story ready to go..."

Nosferatu is slated for release this month. Visit the official website at books.vampires.com for more info. 🧛



Seemingly out of the blue, DC decided to revive some of its army comics for the month of September with a series of one-shots. At the top of the heap is *Weird War Tales*, made up of three stories dealing with the bizarre and horrific. "Private Parker Sees Thunder Lizards" by Jan Strnad and Gabriel Hardman is a poignant look at childhood nostalgia in the face of violent warfare, while Ivan Brandon and Nic Kiem's "The Hell Above Us" is a claustrophobic and damning indictment of war's endless cycle. The standout, however, is Darwyn Cooke and Dave Stewart's "Armistice Night" in which the corpses of famous war leaders come back to life for some fun and frolic. It's creepy, funny and well worth the price of admission.

The Scourge is an attempt to replicate, in comics form, that edge-of-your-seat excitement found in summer blockbuster movies. In fact, the idea – a sort of virus that transforms



people into blood-thirsty gargoyles – was conceived by *Aliens/Terminator* producer Gale Anne Hurd. Only problem is, this first chapter is severely lacking in said excitement. Instead we're introduced to our hero, S.W.A.T. officer Griffin,

who stumbles upon the infection while hiking with a friend in France. Now, I realize that every story requires some build-up, however, back in July, Aspen published *The Scourge* #0, a twelve-page preview that threw the reader straight into the action, with Griffin taking on the gargoyles. Had that been rolled into the first issue, we would have been off to a great start. As it is, it's probably best to wait until the inevitable trade is out and read the whole story in one sitting.

The fifteen stories in the trade *EEEE!* are a loving homage to classic EC comics. It's obvious that Jason Paulos is a fan of those twisted tales and is trying his best to emulate them. He doesn't always succeed, though, especially when it comes to revealing a story's

shock ending. He manages to set up all the right elements – strange characters, bizarre settings, violent murders – but his tales often lack the sharp punch that made the old EC stories so



memorable. Occasionally he does hit the target dead-on, such as with "Just Desserts," in which an obnoxious food critic meets a fitting and satisfying end. Still, Paulos' gorgeous art is more than enough to captivate comics fans. He captures the look and feel of classic horror

hashed several times within the genre; the details are certainly familiar, but the retro-modern spin (think 1950s style but with a lot more sex and gore) gives it all a fresh touch. Note to IDW: please, please, please get cover artist Steve Mannon working on a full project ASAP!

Pinocchio: Vampire Slayer was one of the most innovative horror comics of 2009. This fall sees the release of that book's sequel, and I'm pleased to say that it's every bit as good as its predecessor. In *Pinocchio: Vampire Slayer* and *The Great Puppet Theater*, Pinocchio is hot on the trail of the vampires' origins, but this time he's accompanied by a group of similarly sentient puppets

that share his love of slaying. Along the way, he confronts gypsy vampires and pirates, falls in love and learns that getting what you wish for doesn't always work out the way you expected. Dusty Higgins and Van Jensen continue to tell a genuinely exciting tale filled with fantastic characters, touching moments and plenty of laugh-out-loud scenes. The story moves in some really startling



The poop finally hits the deck in *IT: The Terror From Beyond Space* #3. In the final chapter of IDW's update of the classic MGM film, the space crew of the Challenge 142 make a desperate stand against the alien creature that's invaded their ship. After two issues of set-up, we finally see the alien cut loose, literally ripping crewmember

after crewmember apart. Dara Nargah and Mark Dos Santos have done a good job of adapting a story that has already been re-

directions, with plenty of twists and a truly surprising ending that will leave you wanting more. Easily one of the best books of 2010. ☺



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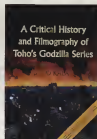
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IN GOOZ' WE TRUST • NO BACKBONE! • MAD SCIENCE 101

A CRITICAL HISTORY AND FILMOGRAPHY OF TOHO'S GODZILLA SERIES

David Kalat
McFarland

While billed as a critical history, David Kalat's newly revised edition of his 1997 work on Godzilla is actually more of a cultural history. A chronological look at how the king of kaiju's city-stomping exploits evolved from a chilling reminder of nuclear destruction to a global pop culture phenomenon, this highly informative book is not only the first and last word on the character and his prolific filmography, but also a revealing examination of the cultural differences between the Eastern and Western hemispheres.

Balancing accessible prose with astute observations, Kalat's definitive assessment details about 35 films released by Toho since the mid-1950s. But out of the discussion of the differences between the Japanese version of each film and its re-dubbed American counterpart comes startling and fascinating insights that will impress even long-time Godzilla fans. For example, Kalat points out that Japan's unprecedented economic prosperity, and not a desire to pander to children, is the reason that camp fantasy elements were introduced throughout the 1960s. Also interesting is American critics' inability to reconcile Toho's low-budget genre films with their prestigious auteur output; Kalat notes that newspapers would often dismiss an actor's abilities when he appeared in a Godzilla film, only to praise him if he had a part in an Akira Kurosawa film later on.

Since the last version of *A Critical History and Filmography of Toho's Godzilla Series* was released, new Godzilla adventures have unfolded on the big screen, while the DVD boom has given American audiences unprecedented access to the original Japanese versions of many Toho classics. Accordingly, Kalat's revised edition has been updated with additional references and a whole new section on the films from the last thirteen years, including the 1998 Hollywood remake of Godzilla.

While he doesn't make much of an effort to excuse the remake's failure, the author does spend a little too much energy debunking the original Japanese films' American reviews, discussing the difficulties of dubbing and cultural references that American audiences were unequipped to understand at the time. This defensive reflex is unnecessary though because Kalat's compelling arguments – and his excellent book in general – are more than enough to legitimize and prove the cultural worth of this venerable series.

PAUL CORUPE

HORROR MOVIE FREAK

Don Summer
Krause Publications

After reading *Horror Movie Freak*, one cannot help but wonder whether author Don Summer is aiming at creating a primer for budding scary movie newbies or making a definitive statement on essential horror viewing for those who consider themselves genre aficionados. Formulated as a pseudo-reference text, *Horror Movie Freak*

categorizes the films it covers into various broad sub-categories such as Classics, Evil From Hell, Supernatural Thrillers and Aberrations of Nature, the last of which loses some credibility due to the inclusion of the blatant Jaws rip-off *Grizzly*.

After an elementary introductory essay titled *Why We Love Horror Movies*, which cribes the rules of surviving a fright flick straight from Wes Craven's *Scream*, Summer writes, "*Horror Movie Freak* is not a listing of 'best' horror movies, but rather a collection of ones that fall into a variety of horror subgenres with the simple inclusion criteria that they don't suck." Unfortunately, what sucks and what doesn't can be a tricky road to travel, subject to the tastes and predilections of the viewer. Does James Wan's mediocre *Dead Silence* or 2003's clichéd *Darkness Falls* really rate above the criminally omitted Guillermo del Toro ghost story *The Devil's Backbone* or John Carpenter's classic *The Fog* (the remake of which, by the way, gets a nod in the book)?

Toward the end of *Horror Movie Freak*, Summer shakes things up a little by looking at the trend of remakes (*The Diner*, *Thirteen Ghosts* and *Pulse*), paying tribute to the genre's scream queens and offering up a list of ten movies one should watch before October 31, which inexplicably includes Bob Clark's yuletide-themed *Black Christmas*.

Ultimately, *Horror Movie Freak* fails to satisfyingly flesh out any of the films it highlights with interesting facts, anecdotes or trivia, the lack of which will undoubtedly leave the majority of seasoned terror fans wanting. However,

Horror Movie Freak:
James Wan's *Dead Silence*

with its easily digestible plot synopses of each featured movie, as well as an abundance of stills, quotes and marketing materials littering its 250-plus pages, *Horror Movie Freak* could easily succeed as a makeshift intro to Horror class.

JESS PEACOCK

SCARY SCIENCE: 25 CREEPY EXPERIMENTS

Shar Levine, Leslie Johnstone and Ashley Spires
Scholastic Canada

[Our fearless eleven-year-old critic gives us the kid's-eye view on mad science.]

Most kids love experiments, no matter how old they may be. Some kids like experiments because they make a huge mess, while other kids like them because they are learning something. All of the experiments in this book are horror-related and include different characters, such as ghosts, goblins and zombies. The experiments are supposed to be scary, but honestly, I don't think they were very scary at all. However, what the book does provide are really cool and interesting experiments based on science, using items found around the house — eggs, rubber bands, nylons — and cooking ingredients, like baking soda and vinegar.

I was able to do fifteen out of the 25 experiments. Most I did without adult supervision, but the ones that suggested help do so for a reason, since some of the tasks are a bit tricky or could end up in a big mess (like Bubbling Allen Blood and The Exploding Stomach). Almost every experiment worked out just as the book said it would (except Spiderwebs, which I found time-consuming since it took more than five hours to make and didn't even turn out in the end). For the ten experiments I didn't do (including Flesh-Eating Zombie, Levitating Spirits and Things That Glow in the Dark), it was mainly because I didn't have the supplies, like a black light, borax, guar gum, citric acid or a PVC plumbing pipe. These items can be purchased at stores with the help of parents but not having them on hand will make it impossible to do the experiments.

I would recommend this book because I like doing experiments and these ones are especially fun. I also liked how the book gave a scientific explanation for how the projects worked and why I ended up with the results that I did. I think this would be a great book for people to have at home because you can do most of the experiments using supplies on hand and kids can do some of them independently. Teachers could also use this book at school because it's a fun way to learn about science and there are "Strange... But True" facts for each experiment that would keep the students interested.

HANNAH GARCES-SLOANE

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THE GRIM READER

STORIES FROM
THE PLAGUE YEARS

Michael Marano
Cemetery Dance

With this marily unreliable narrator, you may never trust a protagonist again. Award-winning dark fantasy author and frequent Cemetery Dance contributor Michael Marano compiles seven shorts and two novellas for this collection of abstract stories exploring disjointed minds. Explore the delusional brain of a serial killer in "Displacement" or examine how illness erodes sanity ("Winter Requiem"). An inconsistent but intriguing series of manfucks.

JESSA SOBCZAK

AUTUMN

David Moody
Thomas Dunne

David Moody's *Autumn* tells the story of (right) another zombie pandemic and the people who must survive it. As is typically the case with Moody's work, it's well written and features strongly rendered characters, but this tale ultimately lacks the spark of his high-octane *Helter*, and will feel too familiar to anyone who has read or watched anything rotter-related in the past ten years. For completists and unrepentant zombiephiles only.

BRAD ABRAHAM

THE ART OF DREW SZIMZAN

Drew Szimzan
and David J. Schow
Titan

Director Frank Darabont's rousing introduction against the current trend of Photoshopped movie posters versus beautifully hand-crafted artwork almost brought tears to my illustration-loving eyes. And he's absolutely right, Drew Szimzan is indeed a dying breed of artist. This new oversized coffee-table tome gives us a privileged step-by-step look at Szimzan's process (with *Hallovy and The Green Mile*) and insight into his most iconic works (including *The Thing* and *The Mist*).

GARY PULLIN

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GHOSTS ON THE EAST COAST

LISA LADOUCEUR

AS READERS OF *RUE MORQUE'S* TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR KNOW, THE WORLD IS FULL OF CREEPY ATTRACTIONS AND HORRIFIC HISTORICAL SITES JUST WAITING TO BE VISITED. And, as J.W. Ocker will tell you, a large concentration of these are located in New England. Birthplace of Stephen King, Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft, the Northeastern part of America has enough ghostly tourist destinations to fill a whole book like *The New England Grimpendum* (out now from Countryman Press). Ocker's new guide to the macabre and ghostly sites of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

A lifetime horror fan, Ocker runs the blog www.addthingsiveseen.com, where he documents his travels in search of the strange and unusual. Currently a resident of Nashua, New Hampshire, his take on why this part of the continent has such a wealth of material for him is simple.

"Age," he explains. "It's one of the oldest areas of the US. I'm originally from the DC area, and down there everything is brand new, whereas here I have ten graveyards within a couple of miles of me that are hundreds of years old. History is often just a synonym for the macabre: wars, death. I guess that's some kind of inspiration for people like King and Poe and Lovecraft, people born in New England."

Ocker's *Grimpendium* collects the most horror-themed of his blog posts, and many new additions, into a comprehensive source of info on horror movie shooting locations, cemeteries, horror icon homes, monsters and myths of the area. *Lonely Planet* it ain't!

"It's not just a catalogue of haunted houses or folklore. It has real things you can see, touch, experience," says Ocker. Some of these things will likely be familiar: Lizzie Borden's B&B, the *Session 9* asylum-turned-apartment complex or the town of Salem. But then there are also quirky surprises: the Lake Champlain Monster (a.k.a. "Champ") of Burlington, VT or a plaque commemorating the great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919. Of particular interest to genre fans will be the detailed descriptions on visiting more than twenty locations used for horror films, from the grand manor houses seen in *Let's Scare Jessica To Death* and *Dark Shadows*, to the churches used for *The Witches of Eastwick* and *I Spat on Your Grave* (1978), to the humane cemetery featured in *Pet Sematary* and, a favourite of the author's, the *Beetlejuice* bridge.

Sordid Sights: (left to right) The exsanguy at General Hospital, the Poe Memorial, and the International Cryptology Museum

Ocker, who culled the info mostly from IMDb then set out with printouts of Google maps and DVD screen grabs, lets you know which locations are off-limits private property and which can be traipsed through. (Somewhat surprisingly, few if any towns trumpet their places in horror cinema history, not even Martha's Vineyard, seaside home of *Jaws*.) One gets the sense that these are off the beaten path. Even at a huge institution in a major city such as Boston, you'll probably have the attractions to yourself.

"One of my favourite items in the book is the Massachusetts General Hospital Mommy," says Ocker. "The old operating room is a national landmark, anyone can just walk in, and there in the room you can see one of the first mummies that ever entered the US. Boston is such a huge tourist city with colonial attractions and this is by far the coolest thing I've ever seen there."

The *Grimpendium* can be enjoyed whether or not you ever leave your own home. (In fact, intrepid travelers will want to pack a GPS, for the book does not offer the kind of handy at-a-glance maps typical of travel guides.) But for Ocker, the whole point is getting out there and experiencing the sites with your own eyes.

"Seeing the grave of an author or a filming location or something from history makes everything about them seem more real," he says. "Before visiting Poe's grave, he was just a collection of stories to me — both in the sense of his work and the anecdotes about his life. Now that I've stood above his bones, his work takes on a different feel. Also, every time I watch a movie whose filming location I've been to, I feel like I develop some kind of stake in that movie. It gives you a new connection."



THE GRIMPENDIUM



DRAMAS FROM THE DEPTHS

Reggie Oliver
Cartagena Press



Reggie Oliver's *Dramas from the Depths* is the size of an old family bible. And rightfully so. This omnibus (fully illustrated by the author) gathers together Oliver's four collections to date. That's 47 stories, one novella, five essays and five short articles of macabre whimsy called "Oliver's Cabinet of Curiosities."

Much of Oliver's repertoire is stylistically reminiscent of the 19th-century supernatural writers – reserved and leisurely paced. Aware of, but not governed by that tradition, Oliver's world is one of bleak boarding schools, overgrown estates and decrepit theatres. His characters, too, are often like decaying Gothic mansions: shabby remnants of a genteel class desperately clinging to the illusion of former glories. Even stories set in the modern day are saturated with a sense of an encroaching and frequently obscured past. In fact, many of the tales read like confessions told in a bid to unburden the soul.

Oliver maintains a consistently high standard and some stories are genuinely startling: "The Golden Basilica" is a tale of loss with an ending that is as darkly comic as it is sad, while "The Complete Symphonies of Adolf Hitler" features an alternate reality bleeding into our own.

While Oliver has his own distinct voice, he is clearly an admirer of M.R. James. Not only does *Dramas* include an essay on the ghost story master, but "The Sermons of Dr. Hodnet" professes to be a lost story by the author. Another, "A Warning to the Antiquary," features James as a character – and a sinister one at that. Also in the collection is a posthumous collaboration with James: the completion of an unfinished story called "The Game of Beauty."

Oliver is an established actor and playwright, which is why so many of his stories relate to the theatre. Additionally, his tenure on the stage also seems to inform his knack for mimicry, whether in dialogue for an ailing Oscar Wilde in "Garden of Strangers" or in scenes from a 17th-century play in "The Constant Rake."

Dramas is an impressive body of work produced over a relatively short period of time (the oldest story is from 2001). A master of his craft, Oliver already appears regularly in horror anthologies – now, it won't be long before he takes centre stage before a larger audience.

BRIAN J. SHOWERS

DARK ECHO

F.G. Cottam
St. Martin's



It's a haunting on the high seas in *Dark Echo*, the second novel from F.G. Cottam (originally published in the UK in 2008), which is now enjoying a North American release from St. Martin's Press. This contemporary Gothic mystery is a carefully constructed tale, as much about a cursed boat as it is about its many fateful owners. While the reading is certainly not light, by employing heady, descriptive passages mixed with journal entries and shifting narrative voices, Cottam keeps a steady pace, building deep psychological tension and layers of mystery along the way.

When wealthy businessman Magnus Stannard suddenly buys a vintage vessel at auction and announces his plan to retire early and sail the Atlantic, even though he has no seafaring experience, his son Martin becomes seriously concerned – especially given that dear old dad intends to take him along on the trip. As it turns out, the craft originally belonged to the late Harry Spalding – a soldier who boxed Ernest Hemingway (and won) and could drink T.S. Eliot under the table – who seems able to maintain some unearthly link to his old yacht.

The subsequent owners of the craft have all since died in tragic, grotesque ways and a mass of fog always seems to cling to the vessel.

Despite its bloody history, Magnus begins preparing the boat for the trip but, almost immediately, myriad disturbing and disfiguring accidents befall the restoration crew. Even when evidence ultimately reveals that Harry Spalding was a serial killer well-versed in salaried magic, Magnus still sets sail on what now looks to be a suicide mission. Martin reluctantly follows with the slim hope of bringing his father back from the grips of insanity.

Dark Echo delivers deep psychological horror, driven by a mounting feeling of dread, which is punctuated by tortuously descriptive scenes of abominable gore. These elements combined create a tremendously disturbing atmosphere that never ebbs, and only continues to gain momentum until the truly shocking plot twist at the novel's end.

JESSA SOBZCZUK

LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

CANADIANS CALL TO BAN BLOODSUCKERS?

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT A SOCIETY BASED ON WHAT IT SEEMS TO LIMIT – whether through prohibition or censorship. Hence, I always look forward to Banned Books Week and the release of the various library associations' Most Challenged Titles lists, if only to see what literature has gotten everyday folks up in arms lately. But I can honestly say this year's Canadian Library Association chart-topper has me genuinely flummoxed.

I mean, even if one does not subscribe to a particular belief system, one can usually understand why a title draws controversy. In the instance of the much-challenged *Harry Potter* series, it isn't difficult to see how fundamentalist Christianity makes the leap from wizards and magic to devil worship. (We've seen the same hysteria about rock music and goth culture for decades, after all.)

But this year's most challenged title, or rather series, doesn't offer up such common sense explanations. In fact, since it is very much for grown-ups, it lacks them entirely. You see, the books in question are Charlaine Harris' Southern Vampire Mysteries, the inspiration for HBO's daily popular series *True Blood*. A-ha! you say, that show is full of explicit sex, violence, bloodshed and queer relationships – of course the puritans are going to be upset! But this is where the argument falls apart, because the books are, well, simply not.

When I reviewed Harris' latest novel in *RMF101*, I pointed out that the series, despite its monsters, bore more in common with the urban fantasy and mystery genres than horror, regardless of the excesses of Alan Ball's TV adaptation. In fact, nearly every horror novel out there has more graphic violence and gore (including those penned by Stephen King), and the majority of best-selling novels (of almost any genre) have a comparable amount of sex. In fact, if Harris' series had a cinematic rating, it wouldn't even come close to an R.

This leads me to believe these complaints were most likely filed by folks who haven't actually read the novels, but rather, saw the TV show, noted it was inspired by a book series, then immediately jumped to some very silly conclusions. If the *Sookiee* *Stackhouse* novels are worthy of being the most challenged titles of the year, then nothing is safe – not that Jack Kochman novel you're reading, nor the crime fiction that your parents love.

Good thing our libraries aren't so easily swayed, or else their genre sections might dry up entirely. So what have we learned from all this, Dear Reader? That it seems possible that the deeds of one medium, in this case TV, can unduly influence people's opinion of another. In our multi-format world, a creator shouldn't be judged on the output of an adaptor. That'd be a dangerous new precedent indeed.

MONICA S. KUEHLER



TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

WHITBY DRACULA WALK - WHITBY, ENGLAND

BY JAMES ROSE



Despite the cold weather, Whitby is busy. The narrow cobblestone streets are filled with tourists browsing the town's many gift shops. Most are eating the staple lunch of the British seaside: fish and chips. So much so, the air is thick with the smell of vinegar and salt. While many holidaymakers come to this small harbour community (pop: 13,600) to complete the day-long tour of historic sites – including the Captain Cook monument, the whale bone arch and the towering remains of Whitby Abbey – there are a number of tourists who make the journey for a more sinister reason. The gift shop windows provide the first clue: placed alongside more typical trinkets, such as snow globes of the Abbey, are a tall, caped figure and small coffins whose lids are just opening. There are also many types of fudge made here with blood-red centres, which celebrate Whitby's other great tourist attraction: Count Dracula.

Bram Stoker entered into the pantheon of classic horror with his 1897 novel *Dracula*. Ever popular, the book is quintessential Gothic lit, featuring all the premissable imagery of the genre, as well as a dark and brooding narrative that retains the power to frighten to this day. From its foreboding start in Transylvania to the Count's arrival on the storm-battered shores of Whitby to his residency in London, the story of *Dracula* as laid out by Stoker was pivotal in establishing the generic imagery now associated with the vampire.

The Irish author had begun researching and writing the novel prior to his arrival in Whitby in 1890. Whilst staying in a small inn at the river's edge, he recognized the town's Gothic potential and began to incorporate its geography, locations and past events into the developing narrative. While the Whitby that Stoker visited has long vanished, elements of what he saw remain – enough to warrant the publication of the *Whitby Dracula Trail*, a guidebook prepared in cooperation with the Secretary of the Dracula Society, Bernard Davies. The booklet contains a map and walking instructions for a self-

guided tour around the town's locales featured in *Dracula*, along with descriptions of how the novel's narrative converges with local history.

As instructed by the guide, I begin my walk at the Bram Stoker Memorial Seat. Fashioned in Victorian style, the bench is placed atop Spion Kop, the stone hill that overlooks the town and harbour, and is positioned to approximate the view that inspired Stoker to use Whitby as the setting for *Dracula*'s arrival in England. I take in the sweeping panorama of the entire town with its many tiered houses, as well as the North Sea, the harbour, the Abbey and the iron bridge. It is an impressive start to the trail – even on a cold, grey day – and one that firmly places each of the novel's locations into geographical perspective. From here, it is easy to see why Stoker was so impressed by Whitby: the sea battering against the high stone walls of the harbour, the townhouses dwarfed by the Abbey ruins, the narrow streets and rugged cliffs, all evoking a potential threat. It's a town that seems to invite the supernatural.

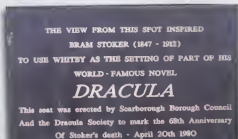
Behind me, the booklet explains, is East Crescent. It is in one of these nine houses that the novel's heroine, Mina, and her friend Lucy stayed for the duration of their summer holiday. Although the exact house isn't mentioned in the story, number seven is. That's the residence of a lawyer who *Dracula* employed to organize his passage to England.

The trail then takes me down a steep, curving path to Pier Road and into the busy harbour and fish market. I follow this road to the iron swing-bridge;

referred to as a drawbridge in Stoker's novel, it is here that Mina crosses the River Esk when she attempts to find the seemingly possessed Lucy. Once crossed, the trail's route splits in two – one path following Mina's flight up the 199 steps to the cliff-top and the Abbey, whilst the other takes a brief detour to the Tate Hill pier and sands. I walk down the narrow streets to the sands first.

It's on this relatively small beach that Stoker's fictional Russian schooner *The Demeter* crashes ashore. With the captain dead and lashed to the wheel, and his crew missing, the only sign of life onboard the ship is an immense black dog that leaps from the bow. As the guidebook states, Stoker based this scene on a real event, in 1886, a ship called *The Dmitry* floundered off the Whitby coast, shedding its cargo of coffins into the sea. The day after, the bodies therein were washed ashore, all in varying states of decomposition. It is these little details that truly make the *Dracula Trail* experience come alive – and even more so when Davies expands upon the novel's origins and makes connections with other supernatural aspects of the town's folklore. For instance, when describing the dog that *Dracula* transformed into, Davies suggests a connection between the famed Yorkshire Barguest – a monstrous black canine – that is reputed to haunt Whitby's streets after dark.

I take the path back to the 199 steps that wind their way up the side of East Cliff. It's a hard climb, but looking back when I am halfway up provides the opposite view from the Stoker memorial bench, affording another impressive panorama. Mina makes her way up these steps when attempting to rescue Lucy from her trance; at the top is St. Mary's Church and graveyard. Catching her breath, Mina can see Lucy on her favourite bench. In the half-light she can also see a long, black shape next to her. Running towards her, Mina's view is momentarily obstructed and when she reaches the bench Lucy is alone. It is here that the Trail ends, with the booklet describing the location of Mina and Lucy's bench and the fact that the



seat was placed over the grave of one George Cannon – a suicide buried as an accidental death. There are no traces of his grave today, unsurprising given those tombstones that still remain are weather-beaten and splintered, with their inscriptions all but eroded away.

In all, the Whitby Dracula Trail is a stimulating walk "around" part of a novel, with historic asides to enrich the experience and evoke the atmosphere of Victorian Whitby. My interest was piqued enough to undertake further research into Stoker's stay there, revealing an interesting set of stories. One account suggests that at dusk the room in which he lodged would be visited by pigeons. Occupying the windowsill, they would peck at their own reflections. This sharp, cracking noise would later be used by the author to describe the Count's tapping on Lucy's bedroom window with his long, sharp fingernails. Another story posits that the bats within the lodging's stables suggested to Stoker that the Count could physically transform into a bat, a wild dog and mast.

While these may be nothing more than fanciful elaborations, another has the potential to be grounded in fact. As Stoker continued his research into the myths of the vampire, he visited the Whitby library, where he found *An Account of the Principallities of Wallachia and Moldavia* by William Wilkinson (1820). Prior to reading this book, Stoker had intended to name his count "Wampyr," but through this text he discovered Vlad Dracula. Attracted to the name, Stoker (apparently mistakenly) established that Dracula translated as "Devil," which led him to change his antagonist's name.

It would seem that amongst Whitby's modern houses, historic sites and gift shops, the town has a dark and immortal heart. One that can be found in the narrow cobbled streets, on its windswept beach, in the climb of 199 steps, in a little guidebook and in the pages of a classic horror novel.

The Whitby Dracula Trail is published by the Scarborough Borough Council Department of Tourism and Leisure Services and is available from the Whitby Tourist Information Centre for 50p. The Tourist Information Centre can be found on Langbourne Road. It is open daily May, June and September 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., July and August Saturday to Thursday 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Fridays 9:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., October to April 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is closed December 24 through 26 and January 1.



Step into Stoker's Story: (clockwise from top) The remains of Whitby Abbey; the Telford Hill sands where the author set the crash of *The Demeter*; Whitby viewed from the Bram Stoker Memorial Seat (the 199 steps, and (opposite) a plaque commemorating the author and his famous novel, located at the Memorial Seat

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THE GOREMET

THE LAW AND INNER DEPRAVITY

B...Couture had a website, Inner Depravity, which contained two short films and a number of photo sets. The Montreal, Quebec-based artist described his site as "the private photographic diary of a killer." The photos were highly stylized and gruesome depictions of a serial killer at work, which were clearly intended to be seen as art. Couture, age 33, is largely self-taught, and has since gone on to work as a makeup and effects artist with Adrien Morot's Moesha Studio on films such as *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, *Death Race* and *Avenger: Warzone*. Couture's makeup effects are so realistic, in fact, that he's facing two years in prison for them.

On October 28, 2009, Couture received an email from a man who said he had discovered Couture's special effects business website — RemyFX.com — and wanted Couture to shoot some custom photos to give out at a Halloween party. Couture arranged for a photographer and set up an appointment for the following day. Just before the session was to begin, Couture was lured outside and arrested. He was handcuffed, taken to a police station and interrogated. His apartment was searched, his computer equipment seized and the site shut down.

"The complaint is from Interpol," says Couture. "I'm accused of publication of obscene material and corruption of morals. I think my work was disliked by many people who probably pressured them to close my website. I will not be surprised to see that right-wing puritanism is behind this."

Surely Quebec law enforcement has more pressing matters to attend to than prosecuting someone who takes pictures of consenting adults with karo syrup on them. Is there more to this? Did Couture mistreat any of his models or do anything else inappropriate other than take pictures?

"There are no other allegations against me," he says. "Everything is fiction; there are no real sexual acts, no torture and no real blood."

Couture is charged under Section 163 of the Canadian Criminal Code, which addresses "Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals." It's ambiguously worded, with 163(B) being particularly troubling. It states, "For the purposes of this Act, any publication a dominant characteristic of which is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of



the following subjects, namely crime, horror, cruelty and violence, shall be deemed to be obscene."

This definition could easily be applied to films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* or *A Serbian Film*, both of which were screened last summer with the approval of the Quebec film classification board, the Régie du Cinéma, at the world-renowned Fantasia International Film Festival in Montreal. Even though these films contain sexual violence as intense as, or worse, than Couture's work, no one was arrested at Fantasia. In fact, the charges against the artist are so ludicrous that people believe this is some sort of publicity stunt, but Couture is not making this up.

On October 13 he appeared in a Montreal courthouse and entered a not guilty plea. His trial was set for November 1.

Dominic Bouchard, Couture's lawyer, does not see any benefit to Canadian society in prosecuting his client.

"Accusing Remy Couture demonstrates an abuse of power and is a very frightening image of the usual Canadian liberty of expression and creativity," he says.

Couture's legal woes can only be looked at as heavy-handed censorship and an assault on his personal freedom, given that he is accused of nothing more than producing and posting to his internet im-

ages that are at best distasteful. In Part 1 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, under Fundamental Freedoms, it states that Canadians have the fundamental freedom of "thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication." Bouchard is confident that this case will not stand up to a challenge under the Charter.

"The Criminal Code must be revisited in regard to these outdated concepts," he explains. "Freedom of expression in 2010 allowed an artist like Remy Couture to produce and create horror movies like he did. ... He's a victim of his own talent and we're going to demonstrate that inside the courtroom."

Couture is defiant and undaunted, but will he continue his work?

"Of course, if I'm found not guilty!" he assures. "Inner Depravity is very popular; it's supposed to introduce you to the mind of a serial killer. I don't see anything illegal in it."

Rue Morgue will follow the case as it goes to trial. Meanwhile, supporters can join the Facebook group (in French) "Accusé à la cour criminelle pour de la fiction," or sign the petition at ipbans.com/innerdepravity.



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REVIEWS BY MARK E. HASAN, AARON VAN LUYK, GEORGE PROCHET,
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RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE

MANDATORY
MILAN RECORDS

With Paul W.S. Anderson back in the director's chair, the sound of the *Resident Evil* franchise returns to the guitar-heavy, industrial racket of the first film. But as skilled as lower-case duo tommandandy are in creating edgy textures from electronic sounds and samples (note their masterwork *Night at Your Door*), much of the score consists of powerful little sonic mobiles that feel looped and overstretched. The sense one gets is of musical ideas expanded to fill out unending zombie combat scenes, leaving any variation or dramatic peaks and valleys to the sound designers. The album has a decisive tone, but the repetitiveness of the cues makes the musical drama somewhat one-sided. "Promise" offers a rare melodic, grunge-free break, and the three-note main theme is a great collage of snarling guitar, clashing flames and fuzzy electrified tones, but it's a score kept underdeveloped. **MHR 2.5**

PRELUDE TO A NIGHTMARE

Carpe Noctem

INDEPENDENT

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's *Prelude to a Nightmare* is really the work of one man: Scott Karan, a.k.a. The Maestro—a name, as *The Stranger in The Big Lebowski* once said, that no one would self-apply where I come from. Despite the pomp, *PlatN's* debut—in-spired by other instrumental spook

acts such as *Midnight Syndicate* and *Nax Arcana*—showcases the same magical sense of whimsy as a Denny Elfman score but with the odd industrial flourish thrown in, such as the percussive unease of "The Terror Within." Otherwise, *Carpe Noctem* runs the expected, albeit accomplished, gamut of growling string foundations ("Time Forgotten"), spell-binding piano sonatas ("Death's Lament"), haunting choral vocals ("Hallowed Grounds"), stabby harpichord (the werewolf-inspired "Full Moon") and tinkling toy pianos (the eerie lullaby "Playful Spirits"). In short, Karan keeps things classic, if not a bit safe, and though *Carpe Noctem* won't expand your musical universe, it definitely sets the creepy mood. **TT 3.5**



PHANTOM 13

PHANTOM RECORDS

Ohio's *Phantom 13* is applying the tried-and-true method of simple zombie-themed lyrics and homegrown punk to its self-titled debut. Among the half-dozen songs that make up this 30-minute offering, you can hear more than just a faint reverberation of the trio's influences, *Motörhead*, *Misfits* and *Psycho Charger* ring out to name a few. But between the layers of homage comes an infectious ardor and sonic ferocity that will definitely strike a primal chord with punk fans. Sutter Cain leads the band with a wailing howl, most effective on the addictive "Kiss of Death" and "N.A.U.," while the rest of the sound is rounded out with psychobilly-tinged bass lines and understated, thrashy guitar riffs. Unfortunately, with the album being this brief, it's difficult to determine where the laundry list of influences stops and the real *Phantom 13* begins. Hopefully the next disc will find the band members more comfortable in their own shoes, and stomping on some new ground. **JS 3.5**



MAD TEA PARTY Rock-n-Roll Ghoul

INDEPENDENT

The sequel to last year's seasonal offering *Zombie Boogie (RM407)*, *Rock-n-Roll Ghoul* takes Mad Tea Party's '80s psychedelic garage rock and winds it around four more tales fit for a witching hour shindig. The Asheville, North Carolina duo of Ami Worthing and Jason Krekel wield an unusual assortment of instruments for this 7" vinyl EP (not net, digital mongers—it's available as a download too, including electric ukulele, fiddle, foot stomps, handclaps and scintillating doo-wop harmonies. The pair grasps its lyrical teeth into flesh-eating music critics on the jangly title track, sing the praises of Vincent Price's turn as the disfigured organist/hopeless romantic on "Dr. Phibes," confess to obsessive love on the plucky, surf pop gem "Possessed," and play it cool in *DI Square Head's* digs with a choice cover of '50s R&B quartet The Hollywood Flames' "Frankenstein's Den." The only downside is it's too brief to truly rot your ears! **TT 3.5**



GRAVEWURM Blood of the Pentagram

HELLS HEADBANGERS

Considering that Virginia's *Gravewurm* has been kicking 'round the underground for twenty years now, one might assume that the band's been honing a lethal, razor-sharp black/trash metal sound. Wrong. *Blood of the Pentagram* loses points immediately with its tarry, pedestrian drum programming, and it just gets worse from there. Opening tracks "Gael Command," "Grave" and "Deeper Dungeons" revel in the most basic mid-paced riff drive, while the wheezing, passionless "vocals" of bassist Zykon sound more like the dying *Skeksis* Emperor from *The Dark Crystal* than anything with power or presence. Black metal should be fearsome and full of absolute, storming menace. This doesn't even sound finished. Frankly, *Hells Headbangers* should be ashamed to even be releasing this glorified *Frisbee* in any format, let alone vinyl or compact disc. *Gravewurm* are a shockingly bad, almost comically shoddy, sub-demo level act, unworthy of more than the trash heap. **GP DDA**

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WICKERMAN RADIO

THE WICKER MAN (1973)

Paul Giovanni

SILK SCREEN

Paul Giovanni's 1973 score still grabs the listener with its harmonic eloquence and exquisite evocation of an isolated pagan community whose charming traditions include burning big things in style. The bulk of the score lies in more than ten songs, of which three are works of art. Performed with folk instruments and soothing vocals, the upbeat "Corn Rigs" is lyrically charming, the soft female voice in "Willow's Song" is ethereally haunting and "Gentle Johnny" is extraordinary for the way first love is conveyed through poetic lyrics and instrumentation that leaves little to the imagination. Giovanni uses harmony and delicate musicianship to support the illusion of an idyllic, close-knit community, as well as to contrast the mental and moral downfall of protagonist Sergeant Howe. Silva's reissue CD presents the songs in amazingly crisp stereo, and the sparse instrumental tracks have been cleaned up and edited into a partial stereo suite. **MHR 3.5**



THE NEW TRIBE

MOTIONLESS IN WHITE | HANNAH'S HORROR AND MARYLIN MANSON ON THE NEW TRIBE CREATURES

BY SEAN PLUMMER

IF YOU THOUGHT *THE LOST BOYS* ONLY INFLUENCED THE MULLET MOVEMENT, THINK AGAIN. Chris Cerulli, frontman for Pennsylvania screamo band Motionless In White, has the words "Lost Boys" tattooed across his knuckles and wrote the song "We Only Come Out at Night," from his band's recently released debut album *Creatures*, in tribute to director Joel Schumacher's 1987 vampire classic.

"[The M] pointed out, 'This is where you belong. This is what you're going to be like for the rest of your life,'" Cerulli says. "It was a movie about being different and finding a home with other people you can relate to, and I identified with all of the characters in that movie. ... It kind of changed my life in some small way. I felt like I belonged."

Named after a song by defunct Orange County hard rock act Eighteen Visions, Motionless In White — which also includes guitarist/vocalist TJ Bell, guitarist Ryan Sitkowski, bassist Rocky Olson, keyboardist Josh Balz and drummer Angelo Paronite — came together in a Scranton high school back in 2004. After landing a spot on the 2007 Vans Warped Tour, the band released two EPs, *The Whorror* (2007) and *When Love Met Destruction* (2008), before signing to Fearless Records for their full-length debut.

Recorded this past May, *Creatures* invokes the emo-infused metal of The Devil Wears Prada and A Day to Remember, with its double-time drums and screamed-versus-clean vocals, but injects elements of Marilyn Manson-style spooky industrial and the symphonic metal of Cradle of Filth.

"When we were doing this record, I wanted it to have a really, really different feel to it, a really scary feel," says Cerulli. "We're pushed as this scary band and

we have this scary aura about us, but if you've listened to our music in the past, it's definitely on the dark side but it's never been scary. It's never matched up."

Creatures, named after the sextet's endearing term for their fans, is chock full of horror. The aforementioned *Lost Boys*-influenced "We Only Come Out at Night" samples Bela Lugosi's Dracula dialogue before launching into an over-the-top anthem sure to have black hearts bobbing at their smeared eyeliner. "London Is Ter-

ror" — written from the perspective of Jack the Ripper — and the Edward Scissorhands-inspired "Scissorhands (The Last Snow)" capitalize on the band's chunky two-guitar attack, tweaking the screamo genre with spooky synthesizers reminiscent of Orgy or Zeromancer.

The album artwork depicts scores of hands emerging, zombie-like, from the earth to grasp at crows, which, for Cerulli, represent the things that feed his growing anger and hatred — namely, a long-term relationship that ended badly, which has significantly contributed to his lyrics.

"Some of the things that were done just really named me as a person," the 24-year-old admits. "It changed who I am from being a nice person to being a really hate-driven and bitter person, and that's what drives a lot of my lyrics. ... The hands are grabbing at the crows. The creatures are coming."

As to Motionless In White's appeal to horror fans, Cerulli, a regular horror convention attendee, welcomes it.

"I feel like our band has this...aura that attracts people that, like Marilyn Manson, would attract the 'misfits' of the crowd, the people that are willing to be different, willing to be themselves and have a mind of their own and not care what people think they look like," he says. "Looking different and not caring about being normal and whatever, that's what horror is to me."



the BLOOD SPATTERED GUIDE

tomandandy GIVE VOICE TO *RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE*

"Enjoy the silence."
— DESPIRE MODE



tomandandy aren't like other guys who score horror films. The duo of Thomas Hadju (Vancouverite) and Andy Milburn (Tucson) are, in addition to composers with credits such as *The Strangers*, *The Hit*, *Have Eyes* remake and *The Mortuary Prophecies*, holders of patents on artificial intelligence who've worked with Lou Reed, William Burroughs and U2. No wonder then that their music for the new *Resident Evil* film sounds a bit different.

With its ambient drones, industrial clang and furious distorted guitars (some courtesy of Limp Bizkit/Black Light Burns guitarist Wes Borland; others actually deconstructed cello), the score is the heaviest in the *RE* film franchise. Thank *RE: Afterlife* helmer Paul W.S. Anderson, who gave them free reign to explore a purely electronic score.

"Paul Anderson, at our first meeting, said, 'I don't want to hear any orchestra,'" explains Hadju by phone from LA. "So we went out and wrote music that had some orchestra in it. And he said, 'No, you don't understand. I don't want to hear any orchestra.' So we started from knowing what we weren't going to do, instead of what we were going to do. And it worked out really, really well."

The negative is part of tomandandy's overall strategy. Hadju points to *The Strangers*, for which a fundamental element of their sound palette was silence. And while *Resident Evil: Afterlife* is more "wall-to-wall music" in service of a 3-D action adventure, he still considers its invisible properties.

"Music is really powerful, because you can't see it but at the same time you can't shut it down, our ears don't shut off," he says. "It's not that we don't love music on its own, but we think music is best when it's in service of something, a multimedia approach."

Ironically, this new score, which the composer calls "celebratory music to kill people by," has become a hit in its own right. At the time of our chat, it was #1 on last.fm (the world's largest online music catalogue) and charting on Amazon and iTunes. So much so that a deluxe edition is in the works for Christmas. So, will the mad scientists ever leave the lab and do it live?

"Not! Not! Not! it's a great question, but the answer is no. We're not performers, we're producers. We live in the Matrix."

SOUND BITE: Toronto surf/punk/pop band Vampire Beach Babes have written theme music for Nancy Krippl's new "vampire" graphic novel, *Vampire Theatre: Surtin!* (undead)

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DISKREET

Engage the Mechanicality
CAMULET RECORDS

If you can look past the ridiculous cover (big dude with a giant sword about to fight a huge monster à la grade six binder concept art) and album title (hard to engage something that isn't a word), you'll find in *DisKREET* one of the better modern technical death metal bands (What kind of name is "DisKREET" for a death metal band anyway?) These not-so-fine folks from Topeka, Kansas sound something like Hate Eternal playing black magic tricks with Despised Icon, characterized by pristine production, machine gun kick drums, blistering fretwork and human monster vocals. Though there's no dominant theme here, a preoccupation with violence and horror is revealed on songs such as "Spinal Cord Collection," "We Are Legion" and "Hunt of Fear." If you dig technical death metal, *DisKREET* is talented enough to impress with its complex musical wizardry despite ultimately bringing nothing new to the subgenre. **AVL 3.5/5**



NOCTURNAL BLOOD

Devastated Graves —
The Morbid Celebration
HELLS HEADBANDERS

Though *California* has spawned many influential one-man acts within the extreme metal spectrum — Leveath and Xasthur among them — Nocturnal Blood is one of the few purveying a more besial, raw style of old school death metal. The

under-produced attack of this debut full-length echoes the netherworldly and occult vibes of such bands as Blasphemy, Behemoth and even Bolt Thrower circa *A Bottle There Is No Law*, while containing enough blistering, tremolo-picked sections to appeal to your average underground brutalizer. Admittedly, this belongs to a special sect of death where atmosphere is key — provided here via thick, detuned guitars, skittering leads and the hollowed-out groan of man, er... "man." Ghostly Apparition — and musical execution is secondary to seething violence. There's a number of bullet-betht battalions making a similar racket, but the charm and honesty of Nocturnal Blood's aural campaign make the band a welcome addition to the blitzkrieg. **GP 3.5/5**



GWAR

Bloody Pit of Horror
MITHIL BLADE

Shedding much of its affinity for political commentary and cosmic reverie, living cartoons GWAR continue to drench the masses in plasma and jazz during the band's two-year 25th anniversary *Slay-a-Bration* with this follow-up to last year's *Lost in Space*. The title *Bloody Pit of Horror* isn't just more medicine show peddling from "front-things" Odenus Urungas, either. Beginning with the resurrection chuggernaut "Zombies, March," the 37-minute album is the band's most horror-encrusted discharge of audio viscera to date. If you aren't already a fan of GWAR's adolescent mockery of everything the straight community either adores or abhors, this album won't convert you. Disciples, however, will gleefully wallow in the pressurized thrash firing of "A Gathering of Ghouls" and heartfelt numbers such as "Tick-Tick" — about a chick whose tits are covered in... well, you know — and a sort of ballad called "You Are My Meat." Grab your rain suit and get in the pit, soundgole! **TT 3.5/5**

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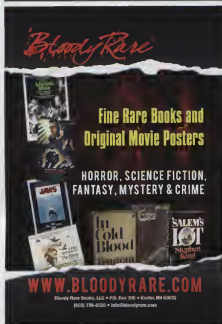
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NOW PLAYING > SAW II: FLESH & BLOOD, TWISTED LANDS: SHADOW TOWN, MAGE: THE AWAKENING



SAW II: FLESH & BLOOD

PS3, Xbox 360
Available

While the movie franchise may have finally worn out its welcome, the *Saw* games keep rolling right along—just

like one of Jigsaw's well-oiled, maniacal machines of bodily destruction.

Saw II: Flesh & Blood, the second outing in the tie-in video game series, picks up directly after the events of the first game, and takes place between the storylines of the first and second feature films. You play Michael, the estranged son of Detective Tapp (Danny Glover in the original film), who sets out to investigate the mystery behind his father's death and unwittingly finds himself the next subject in Jigsaw's bizarre and brutally psychopathic tests of self-sacrifice. After waking up alone in his sinister labyrinth, you'll quickly discover that a modified bear trap has been attached to your head, which will snap shut unless you get it off before the timer runs out. The only way to survive is by using a scalpel to cut open your eyelid to retrieve the key that'll unlock it so that you can move on to the next level; thus, the tone of the proceedings is set.

Negotiating Jigsaw's torture-dungeon workshop in this third-person survival horror outing is a terrifying ordeal, especially since *Flesh & Blood* keeps gamers ensconced in the world established by the films through the inclusion of unique and gruesome mechanical traps that ensnare non-player characters, often resulting in graphic deaths that are both thrilling and loathsome to watch. Throughout the game, you'll attempt to avoid succumbing to your own dire fate, as you run the risk of having your body torn in half by an elevator, being perforated by a kunai wearing a helmet covered in deadly metal spikes or having your head pulverized by a hydraulic press.

"It's still Jigsaw's world," warns *Flesh & Blood* producer and designer John Williamson. "So there's lots of danger around every corner. [But] it's not just a gorefest or a hack-and-slash. There's actually a deeper level to it."

To that end, you'll also have to collect audio tapes, case files and even those creepy, swirly-cheeked Billy puppets, which are hidden on each level and provide clues on how to disarm some of the nefarious gadgets; they also help



you battle the other victims that are trapped alongside you.

This brings us to the one major change from the first game. Namely, the shift from the much-reviled hand-to-hand combat mechanics to a system in which players are forced to rely on their wits instead of their fists to best their enemies. Williamson says the change was a conscious effort to improve on one of the first game's shortcomings.

"There's more logic-based combat," he explains. "Jigsaw will give you a hint on how to dispatch an enemy and then those puzzles get more complicated as the levels go through. So there's a trick in the environment that you need to take and use to your advantage."

So prepare to be much more aware of your surroundings and any items that you might come across during gameplay. There's even a helpful

new in-game checklist to assist you in collecting every clue possible in order to unlock extra achievements. (Some of which provide more background on ancillary characters from the films.)

Though the low-bit graphics are impressively realistic and thoroughly unsettling, it's the disturbing audio soundscape that really amps up the fright factor, not to mention the return of franchise actor Tobin Bell to voice Jigsaw's monologues. (Also, the developers have actually seen fit to include his *Wenesis* this time around—a very welcome addition to the game since he is one seriously freaky dude.)

And if beating the game once wasn't harrowing enough, there are two different endings to experience, though that does mean replaying *Flesh & Blood* through a second time from the beginning. Yes, just when you thought it was over, the games have just begun...

ANDREW LEE

HANDICAP: VERY SCARY, GROSS COMBAT SYSTEM, EXCELLENT GRAPHICS
MISTAKE: GAME PUZZLES ARE TOO HARD OR COMPLETELY RANDOM. EASY TO GET KILLED REPEATEDLY



TWISTED LANDS Shadow Town

TWISTED LANDS: SHADOW TOWN

PC, Mac
Alawar Entertainment

It's no secret that a lot of video games, like TV shows and movies, are formulaic, but this is fucking ridiculous. It wasn't just baseless déjà vu I experienced while playing this latest title from

Alawar, no, I've actually played this game before—last month, in fact, for this very column, when it was called *Vampire Saga: Pandora's Box*.

Okay, so this one's about a young man who awakens after a suspicious boating accident to find himself stranded on a haunted island, instead of about a boat carrying some mysterious vampiric cargo, but that's pretty much where the differences end. And considering VS:PB was an iPhone game and this title's for desktop computers, that's a very bad sign indeed.

7L:ST is a point-and-click game where you travel between the same two dozen or so locales ad nauseum solving simple puzzles and playing find-the-item mini-games in order to track down your missing girlfriend, uncover the island's Lovecraftian, Dagon-esque secret and eventually escape. The cut scenes feel hopelessly dated with their moving dialogue bubbles cast over still images, and despite a few creepy moments spent wandering around lost in the fog, there's not much here to deliver chills either. The ghosts themselves are particularly lo-fi and laughable, appearing like glowing, partially trans-



parent, backlit magazine cut-outs floating over top of the otherwise decent period-styled location backdrops.

Games like this do have a place on portable devices such as iPhones, which have tight graphics and file size limitations, but desktop gamers have come to expect more, even from budget titles. While 7L:ST does come with a bonus playable chapter that's unlocked after the main story is completed, it's just more of the same, so don't be surprised if you find yourself pounding the handy in-game "hint" button relentlessly, if only to shorten the suffering. Or better still, avoid *Shadow Town* entirely.

ALYX KENDLE



HEADLINE: EASY TO LEARN, SUITABLE FOR YOUNGER GAMERS
WISPER: PUZZLES NOT VERY CHALLENGING, REPETITIVE GAME PLAY, NO REPLAY VALUE



MAGE: THE AWAKENING

RPG Sourcebook
White Wolf Publishing

Over the last few years White Wolf has masterfully revamped its Vampire and Werewolf RPGs, so it was only a matter of time before the company decided to tackle its most complex and comprehensive title, *Mage*.

Even though the overwhelming scope of its character arcs, magical themes, settings and antagonists can prove extremely intimidating to some players, this latest

sourcebook takes the *Mage* universe to lofty new heights by giving role players the ability to use its guidelines and story suggestions to create all-new, highly detailed and completely immersive campaigns.

What sets *The Awakening* apart from previous *Mage* sourcebooks is that players can use it to build characters that have just learned about their newfound magical powers, allowing for wider story arcs, while also incorporating the book's innovative restructuring of abilities that now include psychic powers on top of those talents that are passed through ancestral lines. There are also fifteen new chronicles stuffed full of plot hooks; see mages discovering that their powers are slowly driving them insane, uncover the truth about Atlantis or deal with the possibility of an all-out magical war.



The 220-page book is logically organized and includes dozens of gorgeous black and white illustrations. The entire package is designed and bound to look as if it has been passed down through generations of sorcerers and magicians before finally ending up in your eager, spellcasting hands. What you choose to do with its dark power, however, is ultimately up to you.

ANDREW LEE



HEADLINE: EASY TO READ, GREAT ILLUSTRATIONS, ANIMALLY COMPREHENSIVE
WISPER: NOT IDEAL FOR FIRSTTIMERS OR THOSE WHO PREFER THE OLDER MAGE SYSTEMS

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CLASSIC CUT

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

THE ROLLING STONES UK—1968



Just as Lucifer is as old as creation, the Devil has been a part of popular music almost from its inception. The root of all popular music, the blues, has its own mythology, wherein the best known tale is the Faustian concept of selling your soul in return for brilliant musicianship. Just bring your guitar to a deserted crossroads at midnight...

Most often tied to the enigmatic Robert Johnson, creator of such seminal tracks as "Hellhound on My Trail" and "Me and the Devil Blues," the legend has been recounted by countless performers from the blues canon. Researchers believe that the tale has its roots in African folklore, more precisely the spirit of a trickster deity called Legba, who eventually translated on North American soil as a more familiar fiend: Satan.

When rock 'n' roll exploded in the 1950s, all it took was an Elvis Presley hip gyrator for the new craze to be branded "Devil music." Lewd, suggestive and licentious, few artists better embodied the image than Jerry Lee Lewis. A genuinely tortured soul, Lewis had learned to play the piano in church but was constantly torn between the lure of Satan (Fame! Money! Women!) and the calling of the Lord, (Lewis' cousin, tel-evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, even regularly used him as an example in his sermons.)

Nicknamed "The Killer," Lewis—who was married and divorced five times, lost both his sons, was hooked on pills and booze, and earned and lost a fortune twice before the age of 45—often claimed he knew Satan intimately.

However, this image of a rock star's ongoing struggle with Of Scratch changed with the arrival of The Rolling Stones in the 1960s. The opening track of their 1968 album *Beggar's Banquet* told not of a struggle with, but of "Sympathy for the Devil." Instead of being tormented by Lucifer, Mick Jagger adapted the Fallen Angel's guise, singing of his exploits in the first person. After some distinctly Jerry Lee-like primal howling and growling, Jagger eloquently voiced the opening lines: "Please allow me to introduce myself/I'm a man of wealth and taste/I've been around for a long, long year/Stole many a man's soul and faith," before citing works of evil from various eras in human history, including the betrayal of Jesus Christ, the execution of the Russian royal family, and the Blitzkrieg, when the narrator "held a general's rank" and "the bodies stank."

Lyrically, Jagger has admitted he was influenced by 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire, but comparisons have also been made to The

Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov. The song eschews the supernatural almost completely, focusing instead on very real, human acts of evil. The listener is made an accomplice in the passage referencing the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy (the latter killed while the band was in the studio, requiring a last-minute change to a plural: "I shouted out 'Who killed the Kennedys? / When after all it was you and me'").

Having previously released the album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, The Stones were soon accused of actually being Satanists, and "Sympathy" continued to gather a shady reputation. During the band's notorious 1968 concert at the Altamont Speedway (immortalized in the Mayles brothers' 1970 film *Gimme Shelter*), a member of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang, who were hired as show security, stabbed an audience member to death. The concert is often cited as the end of the hippie movement.

But Jagger's revamping of the Devil in rock—from a threatening force into an alluring, even sexy, figure—resonated with many bands that followed. In the spirit of one upmanship, groups such as Black Sabbath toyed with the subject increasingly more overtly. Singer Ozzy Osbourne later acknowledged the debt he and Sabbath owed to The Stones when he included a version of "Sympathy for the Devil" on his 2006 album *Under Cover*, and more modern groups such as Guns 'n' Roses (for the soundtrack to the film *Interview with the Vampire*) and Jane's Addiction have recorded it, too. The list of bands that have adopted satanic imagery into their iconographies since then is lengthy and still being written; the recurring controversy never waning long, as witnessed by the media frenzy surrounding Norway's church-burning black metal scene of the 1990s.

Stones guitarist Keith Richards summed it up with astonishing clarity in a 2002 interview with *Rolling Stone* when he said, "I've had very close contact with Lucifer—I've met him several times. Evil—people tend to bury it and hope it sorts itself out and doesn't rear its ugly head. ... You might as well accept the fact that evil is there and deal with it any way you can. 'Sympathy for the Devil' is a song that says, 'Don't forget him.' If you confront him, then he's out of a job."

TOM MES

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